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GLOBAL NEPALIS

Religion, Culture, and Community in a New and Old Diaspora

edited by
David N. Gellner & Sondra L. Hausner

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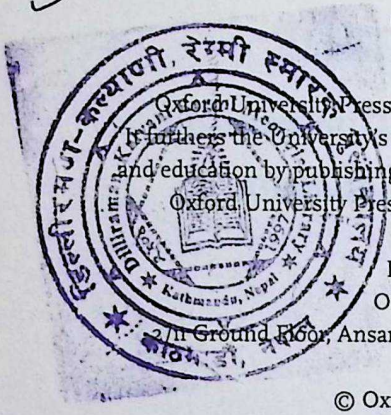

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PREFACE

THIS BOOK IS THE OUTCOME of a three-year project entitled 'Vernacular Religion: Varieties of Religiosity in the Nepali Diaspora' (2009–12) [AH/H015876/1], on which Gellner was the principal investigator and Hausner the co-investigator. Several of the other contributors to this volume were also associated with the project: Bal Gopal Shrestha was the project researcher, Florence Gurung was a funded DPhil student, and both Krishna P. Adhikari and Chandra Kumar Laksamba of the Centre for Nepal Studies UK (CNSUK) were closely involved through carrying out the survey of 300 Nepali households in Britain. The project was supported by a large grant awarded through the Religion and Society research programme, directed by Linda Woodhead and jointly funded by the UK's social science and arts and humanities funding councils, the ESRC and AHRC.[1] At Oxford the grant was administered by the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography (SAME). We are very grateful to all these bodies for their support, without which it would have been impossible either to conduct the original research or, subsequently, to assemble this volume.

We also wish to thank Nepalis living in the UK who welcomed and hosted us graciously, and often enthusiastically, during the years of the project and without whom none of this research could have

[1] See www.religionandsociety.org.uk.

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come to fruition. One of the great pleasures of working closely with CNSUK was having the opportunity to observe Nepalis learning a great deal about fellow members of the diaspora, and in particular about the collective and religious practices of groups other than their own. Directing a research project in which so many learned so much—at both academic and personal levels—was a rare privilege. For help in compiling the combined bibliography, we would like to thank Kate Atherton. The book also benefited from the comments of two anonymous reviewers.

The book clusters its discussions of the Nepali diaspora by geographical region, beginning at 'home' in South Asia, before first moving east to Southeast Asia and then west to the Gulf and the USA. A separate section looks at Nepalis in the UK, as so much of our research took place here, and a final section assesses the diaspora movement of Nepalis from a global perspective. The book begins with a historical assessment of the growth of the Nepali diaspora across these locations, and ends with a conceptual afterword about the nature of diaspora as we understand it from the Nepali context. As a whole, the volume attempts to consider the social and political implications of Nepali migration—its consequences for religious life, ethnic activism, labour conditions, and caste and gender relations—both in Nepal and wherever Nepalis live across the world. It is our hope that, by focusing on Nepali culture in these multiple locations (and by disrupting the easy but erroneous assumption that Nepali culture is only to be found in Nepal), we deepen our understanding of Nepali life, labour movements, and the cultural dynamics that are thus constituted globally, as well as our scholarly comprehension of global diasporas.

In this book, by and large 'Nepali' is used for the language and to refer to people, while 'Nepalese' is restricted to use as an adjective qualifying abstract nouns ('the Nepalese state', 'Nepalese culture', and so on). However, it would have been artificial, and arguably a solecism, to impose this convention on writing about contexts where it is not recognized (for example, Sikkim) and where the term 'Nepali' is consciously avoided. In these cases, we have adhered to the language conventions of the specific contexts being described.

As the various chapters of this book demonstrate, the Nepali diaspora is simultaneously old and young (both in the generational and

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in the community sense) and is constantly developing. This volume, despite its size and its attempt to cover as many cases as possible, does not have, and cannot have, aspirations to be encyclopaedic. Nor have we, as editors, attempted artificially to impose a common approach or style on the contributors; the reader will encounter very different, but largely complementary, 'takes' on similar but also diverse diasporic situations. In short, we do not, and could not, claim to provide any sort of last word on the subjects of religion and community among Nepali diaspora populations. We hope, rather, that this book will stimulate further research both about the Nepali and about other diaspora populations, and that it will encourage intellectual connections and comparisons in an increasingly interconnected world. Much of this future research, as is already the case here, will have the added insight and relevance that come from being conducted by members of the diaspora themselves. In light of the big questions about trans-generational transmission and rupture raised by the chapters of this volume, such research must of necessity be a never-ending process; it can never produce a final pronouncement. We thank our contributors for their insights as well as for their patience in the five years that it has taken to bring this project to fruition.

Oxford, March 2018

David N. Gellner
Sondra L. Hausner

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1

INTRODUCTION

THE NEPALI/GORKHALI DIASPORA SINCE THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

David N. Gellner

DEFINING DIASPORA

TO SPEAK OF DIASPORA IMPLIES a scattering of people from a homeland.[1] In the case of the Jews, and other similar cases, this followed a tragic event and expulsion and/or flight. The key event, and the desire for return, were memorialized through rituals. Those rituals become

[1] This introduction is updated and adapted from an earlier paper (Gellner 2013a). I am grateful to Routledge for permission to reuse it here. For helpful comments I would like to thank D.P. Martinez, J. Whelpton, S. Subedi, M. Hutt, C. Laksamba, S.L. Hausner, T. Subba, M. Sadan, K. Leonard, J. Chatterjee, C. Stewart, and B. Campbell. My debt to the Religion and Society programme is expressed in the preface. This chapter grew directly from work on the Vernacular Religion project [AH/H015876/1]; the editing of the book was completed while in receipt of another research council project, 'Caste, Class, and Culture: Changing Bahun and Dalit Identities in Nepal' [ES/L00240X/1].

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the foundation of collective memory and group identity. In recent decades the term 'diaspora' has been stretched and expanded to refer to any migrant group retaining some memory and some link to their homeland, so that it is no longer possible to insist that diasporas must be born out of suffering and tragedy (Cohen 2008). In this new extended sense, one can even speak of a British diaspora, since there are still people (in New Zealand, for instance) who idealize the home country and whose identity is grounded in maintaining links to it (Cohen 2008: 69f). There is certainly a Scottish diaspora, encouraged and courted by the devolved Scottish government in Edinburgh. However, it would be an elementary error to assume that everyone with a Scottish surname shares Sean Connery's level of 'diasporic consciousness'.

In the Nepali case, as with the Tibetans—and unlike the paradigmatic Jews, Greeks, or Armenians (all defined by adherence to a distinctive religious tradition)—it would be anachronistic to speak of a diaspora before the modern period and the age of nationalism. Diaspora is not the same as migration *tout court*. There have been continual waves of migration into and along the Himalayas, and this is likely to have been so even in prehistoric times. Within historic times the dominant trend has been for migration to be in a north-west to south-east direction along the Himalayan foothills. Thus the Khas people, who are mentioned in textual sources (the Mahabharata among others) as inhabiting Kashmir, are to be found as the 'indigenous' and majority group in western Nepal today. The predominant eastward direction can be explained by the greater rainfall and greater fertility of the land, the further east one goes (Whelpton 2005: 13). As the Khas moved eastwards they encountered peoples speaking Tibeto-Burman languages who had settled in Nepal (arriving from the north or the east) much earlier. There have been plenty of local eddies and countercurrents in population movements alongside the overall, macro west-to-east trend (Dolfuss et al. 2001; Subedi 2016: 25), with the result that the pattern of ethnic settlement that we have today is thoroughly mixed, not to say Balkanized (Sharma 2008).

For a diaspora to exist there has to be a sense of national or quasi-national (religion-based) identity and the people so concerned must be settled outside the territory with which their identity is bound up. Cultural memories of links to a specific place have to last over the

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generations (a process much helped if there is continual movement back to that place). Furthermore, there has to be a *boundary*, however conceived. Unless the people are outside that boundary, they can hardly be said to be in diaspora. Where there are no national boundaries—or where the people themselves do not recognize them—they can hardly have a sense of loss at crossing them. The creation of national boundaries in South Asia is still very much a work in progress, a battle that states are waging against ordinary people who are either unaware of them or, if aware, do not much care for them (Gellner 2013b; van Schendel 2005). It may well be, then, that a 'diasporic consciousness' is more conspicuous or more consistently present in the literary productions of nationalist intellectuals (Hutt 1998) than it is in minds, hearts, and actions of the 'working-class cosmopolitans' (Werbner 2007) who actually move and live abroad. The extent to which they have wished to identify as Nepali or Gorkhali has varied considerably. It has often, and paradoxically, been the case in Bhutan, Darjeeling, and Sikkim that, in order to try and establish themselves in their new host societies, people of Nepali cultural background have had to *deny* that they have any diasporic leanings.[2]

CREATING NEPAL

The modern state of Nepal (though not yet called that) was created in the eighteenth century, largely through the tenacity and strategic vision of one man, Prithvi Narayan Shah (Whelpton 2005). Born in the small hill town of Gorkha in 1722, he became its king in 1743 and immediately travelled to Banaras to buy muskets. Whether or not he anticipated the rise of British power in the subcontinent (as some Nepali historians claim), he was able to create a political unit that dwarfed the tiny kingdom he inherited. At its largest extent, following the conquests of his successors and before the Treaty of Sugauli with the East India Company in 1815, it stretched from the Tista River in the east (now running through Sikkim) to the Sutlej River in the west. Thus the Indian divisions of Kumaon and Garhwal (now in

[2] See Evans (2013); Hutt (2003, 2008); Sinha and Subba (2003); Subba et al. (2009); Subba and Sinha (2016); and Wenner (2013).

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Uttarakhand) were under the Gorkhalis for 25 years, a period still remembered for its oppressive rule (Regmi 1999).

The turning point in Prithvi Narayan's career came in 1768–9 with his conquest of the Kathmandu Valley (Pradhan 1991; Regmi 1999; Stiller 1973), which, despite his suspicions of its virility-sapping luxury, he made his capital. It was a wide fertile bowl capable of supporting a higher and denser population than anywhere else in the Himalayas. It was thus an outpost of Indic agrarian civilization and a self-constituted sacred centre from at least the third century CE. Its inhabitants were the Newars, an amalgam of local and in-migrating groups ranked in more than twenty castes, with their own language (Newari/Nepal Bhasa) and culture. The new state that Prithvi Narayan created was still quite heavily forested and, by today's standards, thinly populated, but with peace and unification, the population began to grow rapidly. Economically the state was based on extraction of peasant surplus and on taxing trade (Regmi 1984). The main trade routes from India to Tibet ran through the Kathmandu Valley. Some Newar artisans had been invited to move to Gorkha already in the seventeenth century. Others had long travelled to Tibet and were settled, as artisans and traders, in the cities of Shigatse, Gyantse, and Lhasa (some had one wife in Nepal and another in Tibet). The Malla kings of the Kathmandu Valley had provided silver coinage for the Tibetans and gaining control of this contract was one of Prithvi Narayan's motivations for conquest.

No Himalayan migrant peoples thought of themselves as Nepalis before the twentieth century, and for most of the nineteenth century it would have been much more natural to present oneself to outsiders as 'Gorkhali', that is to say, as a subject of the Shah dynasty, the 'House of Gorkha' (Whelpton 2008). Their language was also called Gorkhali (an even older term was 'Khas Kura' or 'the speech of the Khas'). This was corrupted as 'Gurkha' in British military parlance; often understood as an ethnic term, it is so only in a very weak and extended sense. There is no tribe or caste of 'Gurkhas' in Nepal. In the nineteenth century the name 'Nepal' referred only to the Kathmandu Valley, a usage still current even today in colloquial speech (*[ma] Nepal jane* is the pithiest and simplest way of saying 'I'm off to Kathmandu'). It was not till the 1920s that Prithvi Narayan's descendants followed the much earlier British colonial labelling practice and officially

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extended the term 'Nepal' to all their possessions. This formed part of the first, hesitant steps towards a new nationalist imagining of the Shah dynasty's subjects as 'Nepalis'.[3]

Thus, if one were to speak of a Nepali diaspora before 1850, it could only have referred to the Newars, the inhabitants of the Nepal or Kathmandu Valley. In the course of the nineteenth century many Newars became the traders and shopkeepers of the new Gorkhali kingdom and settled outside the Kathmandu Valley in small bazaars and district capitals throughout the middle hills. The Newars are seen by other Nepalis as a trading diaspora, though many are in fact artisans, peasants, and labourers rather than shopkeepers and merchants.

As far as the modern Nepali diaspora is concerned, three distinct waves and types of migration can be distinguished: first, overland, mainly seeking work and land, and mainly towards the east; second, again overland, but more focused on seeking work in Indian cities; and finally, third, travelling by plane to work in the Persian Gulf (or 'Arab' as Nepalis refer to it), in Southeast Asia, and beyond, or for education and work in North America, Europe, Japan, and Australasia. The pattern of the first wave was set during the Rana period (1845–1951). The Ranas' autocratic patrimonialism encouraged migration within Nepal (and into the Nepal Tarai from India) in order to expand the state's tax base, while controlling movement into and out of the country and discouraging modern education (English 1985; Regmi 1978; Whelpton 2005). The oppressiveness of the regime led many Nepalis to flee to or remain in British India in search of a new start (Shrestha 1990, 2008). The second wave of migration is primarily a twentieth-century phenomenon; the third wave took off only from the 1990s.

CREATING NEPALINESS (*NEPALIPAN*) IN DIASPORA

An assertive sense of Nepali national identity first emerged—as has often been the case (the first Greek uprising against the Ottomans began from what is now Romania)—in the diaspora. Subsequently, in the twentieth century, the ideas and themes of Nepali nationalism—worked out in Banaras and Darjeeling—were taken up by the Nepali

[3] See Burghart (1984); Chalmers (2003); Hutt (1988); Onta (1996); Whelpton (2005, 2008).

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state (Chalmers 2003; Onta 1996). The first writers to think of themselves as Nepalis were scholarly Brahmins in Banaras. There seems to have been a small Nepali quarter in Banaras since at least the eighteenth century and elite Nepalis came on pilgrimage, or stayed in exile there, even before that (Gaenszle 2002a). It was in the 1880s that the movement for Hindi, led by Harishchandra Bharatendu (Orsini 2002), was getting underway in Banaras, and this clearly stimulated some Banaras-based Nepalis to start producing literature in their own vernacular in order to 'uplift' the language, and to establish it as a worthy vehicle for literature.[4] However, "there remained one overriding limitation of the Nepali literary scene in Banaras: caste and class domination by educated Brahmans who were not reflective of their changing audience" (Chalmers 2002: 90).

In this respect, Darjeeling represented a stark contrast: Bahuns (as Brahmins are called in Nepal), the priestly and therefore literate caste, were present in much smaller numbers than in Nepal itself (see Table 1.1) but their language became the lingua franca, owned and passionately fought for by Darjeeling Nepalis. One of the key figures was Parasmani Pradhan (1898–1986). His father was a Newar Buddhist (a Shakya) who left home for Banaras and was then sent to sell books in Darjeeling. He adopted the prestigious Hindu surname Pradhan, like most Darjeeling-based Newars. Parasmani was educated in Kalimpong and Darjeeling and became a teacher, schools inspector, writer, publisher, and activist. He wrote quantities of Nepali textbooks, dictionaries, grammars, collections of essays, biographies, translations, and plays. He helped to bring about the standardization of the language and led the campaign to have Nepali recognized by the Indian state (it was accepted as the teaching language for all primary schools with a Nepali majority in Darjeeling district in 1935, as a national literary language in 1973, and as a national language of India by inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution in 1992).

In Darjeeling, migration led to a genuine melting pot—at least when viewed from the perspective of Nepal where caste and ethnic differences were backed by state law until the 1950s. Among those who settled in Darjeeling, tribal languages were lost, many converted

4 On the history of Nepali literature (principally poetry and inscriptions) before this period, see Hutt (1988).

Table 1.1 Ethnic/Caste breakdown of Nepali population in different contexts

Group	Nepal, pop'n census 2011	Proportion of establishment jobs in Nepal	Proportion in Gurkha regiments 1894–1913	Darjeeling 1941	Sikkim 2005–06	UK 2009	Delhi 2000
N=	26.5m	1,526	35,443	236,434*	432,198	18,801+	402#
Bahun	12.2%	66.3%		3.5%	9.4%	16–17.7%	38.3%
Chhetri (incl. Thakuri)	19%			11%	16.45%		
Newar	5%	15.2%		5.2%	5%	3.2–5.2%	1.2%
Tamang	5.8%	7.1%¬		18.3%	9.1%	2.2–2.4%	34.3%
Magar	7.1%		36.1%	7.3%	3.6%	15.2–17.8%	
Gurung	1.9%		23.8%	6.5%	7.9%	23.9–24.2%	
Rai	2.3%		14.1%	24%	18%	11.3–12.5%	
Limbu	1.4%		13.4%	7.5%	13.2%	13–18%	
Tharu	6.6%					0.3%^	
Yadav	4%	11.1%					11.9%^
Muslim	4.4%					0.01%	

(Cont'd)

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Table 1.1 (*Cont'd*)

Group	Nepal, pop'n census 2011	Proportion of establishment jobs in Nepal	Proportion in Gurkha regiments 1894–1913	Darjeeling 1941	Sikkim 2005–06	UK 2009	Delhi 2000
Dalit	13.1%	0.3%~		11.5%	8.6%	0.6–1.2%~	14.1%
Other	17.2%		12.6%	5.2%	8.7%	16.79%	
Proportion of overall pop'n	100%			63%	74.3%	c. 0.01%	c. 0.01%

Sources: Nepal census as analysed in Tamang et al. (2014); Neupane (2000) as adapted in Onta (2006); Ragsdale (1990); Pradhan (1982); Tanka Subba (personal communication, based on Government of Sikkim socio-economic survey, 2005–06); CNSUK survey 2008 (see Chapter 13 and Figure 13.2 p. 319 below); Neupane (2005).

Notes: † Categories are not always exactly equivalent. In column one the Dalit figure is controversial; Dalit organizations claim percentages as high as 20% on the grounds that many Dalits are entered as high castes. In column two Bahuns and Chhetris are not distinguished and hill Janajatis are amalgamated, including some 'other' groups. Separate figures for Yadavs and Muslims are not given, but Madheshis as a whole have 11.1% of the top jobs.

* this was 63 per cent of the total Darjeeling population of 376,369.

¬ refers to all Janajatis.

~ refers to Hill Dalits only.

^ refers to all Madheshis.

+ number surveyed; total estimated population of Nepalis in the UK in December 2008: 72,173.

number surveyed, out of a total estimated population of 136,000.

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to Christianity, and intercaste marriages were commonplace. Some Nepalis practised circular migration, reinvesting what they had earned in Darjeeling back home in Nepal (Ortner 1989; Shneiderman 2015). A strong Nepali consciousness based on the language emerged in Darjeeling (Hutt 2008; Pradhan 1982), although ethnic organizations also existed from the 1920s (Minami 2007: 455; Shneiderman 2009: 118, 126–7) and began to assume more importance in the 1990s, as the race to achieve state recognition as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) got under way (Shneiderman and Turin 2006; Vandenhelsken: Chapter 3 below). Thanks to the efforts of Parasmani Pradhan and others like him, "[b]y the late 1930s most of the fundamental questions about Nepaliness had been answered. The Nepali language had adopted a central position in the shared cultural life of Nepalis from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The sense that people from this range of backgrounds could all lay claim to a common identity as 'we Nepalis' had been established and propagated" (Chalmers 2003: 24).

Many Nepalis kept moving, going on to Assam (Russell 2007). As Sinha notes (2009: 15), "[a] considerable number of high caste Nepalese had moved as herdsmen to the marginal forestlands in Northeast India as graziers. In course of time, they turned out to be the industrious peasant cultivators and pioneering dairymen of the region."

The British made use of the Eighth Gurkha Rifles to put down numerous tribal revolts in north-east India during the course of the nineteenth century (Samaddar 2010: 61), a fact that was not forgotten. With the rise of nativist movements in Assam and the whole of north-east India, Nepalis were, "branded as 'foreigners' and 'migrants' ... [and] nicknamed *Dajus* (coolies or porters), *Bahadurs* (chowkidars) and *Kancchas* (household servants). If they raise any demands—literary, political or economic—they are often told to go to Nepal, as the Governor of Assam did recently" (Sinha 2009: 19).

Some Nepalis moved further on to Burma where an estimated 200,000 still live in their own ethnic enclaves as hill farmers among the Kachin and elsewhere, a largely forgotten diaspora (Chapters 4 and 5 in this volume). They are famous as milk-sellers and cowherds in urban areas. When the Japanese invaded in 1942, many fled back to India and Nepal and some even ended up in Kunming in China (Sadan 2007: 237, 239). Some Nepalis migrated even further, whether

before the war or because of it, to Thailand, which is said to have up to 100,000 ethnic Nepalis. Today, as Anil Sakya describes in Chapter 5, Thai-born Nepalis are increasingly joined by economic and (occasionally) religious migrants coming directly from Nepal, attracted by Bangkok's high level of development (Haaland 2008) and Theravada Buddhist education (LeVine and Gellner 2005: 130–70).

Throughout this period the movement of Nepalis into India, and of Indians into Nepal, was free and unhindered—as it remains to this day, guaranteed by the India–Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950.[5] Some Nepalis used this free movement in order to join the indenture ships that took Indians as far afield as Fiji (Chapter 6 in this volume). Goods, on the other hand, were and are subject both to state control and systematic smuggling. In the nineteenth century the rulers of Nepal were keen to attract peasants from British India into Nepal in order to open up the Tarai region, just as Bhutan welcomed Nepalis into its southern region. In relation to these southern frontier territories, considerations of lingual or religious nationalism were conspicuous by their absence and were to emerge only in the 1950s in Nepal (Gaige 2009) and in the 1980s in Bhutan (Evans 2013; Hutt 2003).

This free movement of people meant that by 1871 Nepalis constituted about a third of the 94,712 population of Darjeeling district. Nepali labour from the adjoining districts had started to be attracted to Darjeeling in the 1850s with the establishment of the tea gardens. By 1941 the population of Darjeeling had grown to 376,369 of whom two thirds were Nepali-speakers. As indicated earlier and shown in Table 1.1, the ethnic composition of Darjeeling was very different from the Bahun domination of Banaras, and was also significantly different from Nepal as a whole. Whereas in Nepal Bahuns are 13 per cent of the population, in Darjeeling, according to the 1951 census, they were only 5 per cent (Hutt 2008: 114) and according to the 1941 census only 3.5 per cent. By contrast, those now called Janajatis and then known as 'hill tribes'—the Magars, Gurungs, Tamangs, Rais, and Limbus, along with other smaller groups such as the Sunuwar and Thami (Thangmi)—were in the majority (69 per cent or more compared to

[5] This does not mean that crossing the border into India is easy or unproblematic; on the perils faced by hill Nepalis on their way to India, see Hausner and Sharma (2013).

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40 per cent or less in Nepal). Not surprisingly, given the proximity of east Nepal, Rais and Limbus were present in large numbers. The figures for Sikkim are similar to those for Darjeeling, though Bahuns and Chhetris are more numerous (but still less than their proportion in Nepal). Accurate figures for the ethnic Nepali population of Bhutan are hard to obtain, but it seems that Bahuns and Chhetris were present in considerable numbers, though whether more or less than their proportion in Nepal is impossible to say.[6]

The overwhelming numbers of Nepalis in Sikkim constitute the brute demographic fact lying behind the absorption of Sikkim as the 22nd state of India in 1975 (the combination of democracy and absorption into republican India enabled the majority Nepalis to come to power and sideline the indigenous Bhutias and Lepchas). Fear that the same might happen in Bhutan was the key driver leading to increasing ethnic tensions and the expulsion of more than 100,000 ethnic Nepalis after 1990 (Hutt 2003). In this context the Sikkimese and Darjeeling Nepalis have wanted to demonstrate their allegiance to India, and to deflect the charge that they were a fifth column for 'Greater Nepal'. This means downplaying links to Nepal. Some have insisted that they be called Gorkhas, not Nepalis, while others have tried to popularize the label 'Nepamul' ('of Nepali origin').[7]

Demands for a separate administrative unit for Lepchas, Bhutias, and Nepalis within India go back as far as 1907, but the movement for a separate Gorkhaland state (separate from Bengali domination as part of West Bengal) began in earnest in the 1980s, led by Subhas Ghising and his Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) (Subba 1992; Middleton 2016). The conflict reached its height between May 1986 and July 1988; over a thousand people are thought to have

6 Hutt (2003: 94f). On Nepalis in Darjeeling, also see Bagchi (2012); Chalmers (2003); Shneiderman (2015); Subba (1992); and Wenner (2013).

7 Prem Poddar (2009: 11) comments "I use the term 'Gorkha' ... as a self-descriptive term that has gained currency as a marker of difference for Nepalis living in India as opposed to their brethren and sistren in Nepal ... while this counters the irredentism of a Greater Nepal thesis, it cannot completely exorcise the spectres or temptations of an ethnic absolutism for diasporic subjects." On Nepali identity in northeast India, see Sinha and Subba (2003); Subba et al. (2009); and Subba and Sinha (2016).

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died. The bulk of the violence occurred between the GNLF and local cadres of the CPI (M), which opposed the movement, and between the police and the GNLF, but there were also internal clashes within the GNLF (Subba 1992: 123–50). In 1988, a Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) was conceded with powers over primary education, roads, graveyards, irrigation, tourism, and so on; it covered the three hill subdivisions and those parts of Siliguri where Nepalis are in the majority. Subhas Ghising and his GNLF went on to dominate the DGHC until 2008, when Bimal Gurung and his Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) replaced Ghising. The GJM again raised the demand for a separate state, encouraged by moves elsewhere in India to allow smaller states to be carved out of larger ones.

In 1991 Gorkhaland campaigners destroyed the bust of Bhanubhakta Acharya, the 'adikavi' (founding poet) of the Nepali language, in Darjeeling's Chowrasta, on the grounds that he was a 'foreign poet'. This was a particularly shocking act since it was the Darjeeling Nepalis who had made a hero out of Bhanubhakta in the first place (Hutt 2008: 110; Onta 1996). Bhanubhakta had been made a Darjeeling hero, Subba writes (2008: 222), because "for every Nepali family in Darjeeling, the Bengalis were a reference group" and the Bengalis had their own national poet in Rabindranath Tagore. In Bhutan the same nationalist and anti-diasporic logic led to Nepali-speakers accepting, to some extent and in certain contexts, the official epithet 'Lhotshampa' ('southerner' in Bhutanese) and to wearing the Bhutanese national dress while living in refugee camps in south-east Nepal.

THE 'BRAVE' AND 'SUFFERING' GURKHAS

One of the main ways in which Nepalis moved abroad, often deciding to stay there, was through service as Gurkha soldiers. The 1815 Treaty of Sugauli (or Segowli, as the British rendered it) between the British East India Company and Nepal made no explicit mention of the recruitment of Gurkhas, but it was during the war that preceded it that "the British 'discovered' the Gurkhas" (Caplan 1995: 15). The Nepalese regime (for fear of losing its own fighting men) initially discouraged recruitment and would not allow them to be recruited inside Nepal. As they came to trust the British more, and the diplomatic relationship grew closer, the number of Gurkhas expanded.

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The British generally recruited from those they (and the Nepalis) considered 'martial races' (Caplan 1995; Streets 2004). In the early years, British and indigenous ideas more or less coincided, so that Kshatriya groups and those allied to them were the main recruits. In the Nepal context, this meant largely Thakuris and Chhetris (as Kshatriyas are called in Nepal) and the associated western tribes, the Magars and Gurungs, who had provided the soldiers of Prithvi Narayan's armies. After 1857, British policy shifted markedly away from north Indian plainsmen, and towards peripheral populations like the Sikhs and the Gurkhas. Within the Gurkhas, this was expressed as a definite preference for Magars and Gurungs. Nepali hill groups began to be seen as 'warrior gentlemen', similar to the British in their hardiness, sense of humour, and not taking religion too seriously. In other words, they were not fanatical like Muslims nor were they ritualistic (and supposedly effeminate) like Hindus. The eastern tribes, Rai and Limbu, were finally accepted as martial towards the end of the nineteenth century. The Tamangs, however, resident principally in the hills around Kathmandu, were not recruited, because the Nepalese elite wished to keep them as a reserve army of labour. Some managed to sneak in by passing as Gurungs (a strategy adopted also by some other ethnic groups not favoured by the recruiters).

From 1908 there were ten Gurkha regiments: the first regiment was based in Dharamsala, the second and ninth in Dehradun, the third at Almora, the fourth at Bakloh, the fifth and sixth in Abbotabad, the seventh and tenth at Quetta, and the eighth in Shillong. In all these places Nepali settlements grew up as retired soldiers acquired land or businesses in the areas they knew, preferring to stay on rather than return to Nepal.[8] More than 200,000 Gurkhas participated in WW1 and over 20,000 died. Of the 11,000 Gurkhas discharged after WW1, only a third chose to return to Nepal, the rest remaining in India (Hutt 2008: 113). It is important to note that in the early and middle years of the twentieth century, service in the Gurkhas was not always perceived as the greatly sought-after career that it later

[8] Sagant (1996: 278–312) provides a vivid analysis of the many pressures from kin and from local headmen facing the Gurkha soldier on home leave that encouraged many of them to settle away from their natal villages.

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became—the pursuit of fame, glory, glamour, and wealth in foreign parts as celebrated in Nepali folk songs. Rather, having one's son sent away by the state was something to be avoided and many sought to hide their extra sons by sending them to the mountains as shepherds or to childless aunts and uncles to pretend to be their only son (Des Chene 1991: 276).

After Indian and Pakistani independence the Gurkhas were split between India and the UK, with the second, sixth, seventh, and tenth regiments going to the UK and being transferred to Singapore and Malaya. It was a shock to Gurkha officers when large numbers of the soldiers in these regiments voted to join the Indian Army rather than continue to be officered by the British (Gurkha histories written by the British tend to explain this by claiming that the men had been 'got at' by agitators, but the real motivation may have been the greater opportunity to settle in India at retirement). Des Chene (1991: 207) comments that the British Gurkha regiments had to be

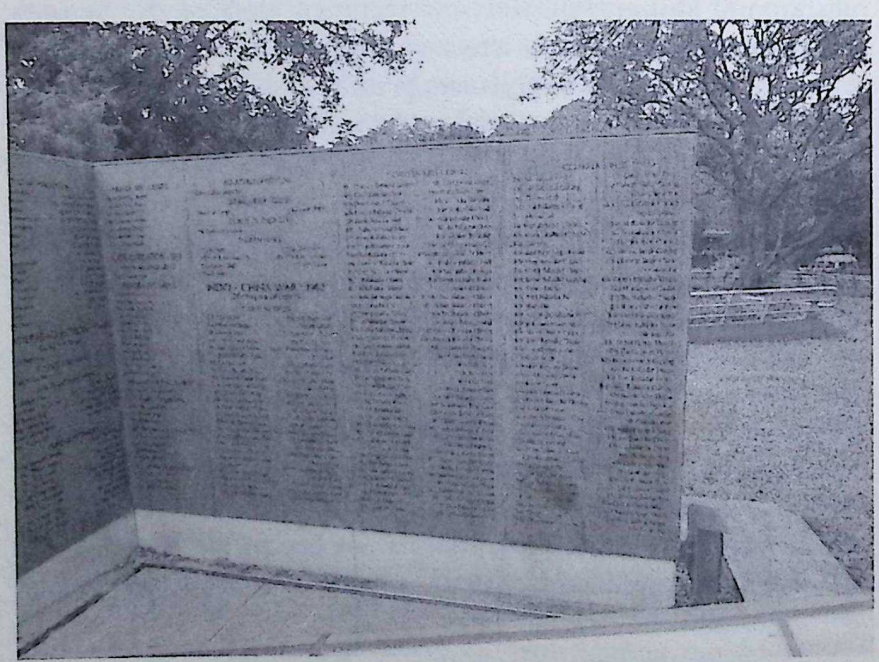

Figure 1.1 Memorial, in the National Military Memorial Park, Bangalore, to the Indian Gorkha Riflemen who fell in the Indo-China war of 1962.

Source: D.N. Gellner (19 January 2016).

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reconstructed from scratch in Malaya. A Tripartite Agreement was signed between India, the UK, and Nepal to allow recruitment from Nepal to continue. As the conditions of British Gurkhas gradually improved, and the numbers recruited decreased, it came to be seen as the most attractive option, with intense competition for places. At the same time, there were considerable misgivings from leftist activists, on combined nationalist and socialist internationalist grounds: it was and is felt that Nepali nationals should not be serving in imperialist armies abroad (Hutt 1989). For those, increasingly numerous, who served in the Indian army, there was also the objection that they were serving the regional hegemon, which—to put it at its mildest—could not be trusted to act in Nepal's best interests. Since 1971 Gurkhas have also been recruited to serve in Brunei and in the Singapore police as well. The problems that they and their families face, following return to Nepal after many years' service, are addressed by Low in Chapter 7 in this volume.

LABOUR MIGRATION TO INDIA

Thus far, I have distinguished two waves of Nepali emigration. A first wave occurred, in increasing numbers, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It consisted of Nepalis seeking land and fleeing oppressive tax and labour demands (Pradhan 1991 stresses the latter; cf. Shrestha 1990). The closest destinations were Darjeeling, Sikkim, and Bhutan. Vandenhelsken, in Chapter 3 of this volume, discusses the descendants of some of these early migrants; the very closeness means that similar religious changes were occurring there as in Nepal itself. Other migrants travelled further from Nepal, to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and on to Burma. Mixed in with this diaspora were retired Gurkha soldiers who preferred to stay where they had served rather than return where they would have to face traditional hierarchies of kinship, caste, and clan. Hutt notes that "in this diaspora, as in many others, much of the 'common culture' was constructed after the migrations, not prior to them" (Hutt 2008: 103).

A second wave of migration overlapped with these earlier movements, starting from the 1950s or perhaps even earlier. The distinctive characteristic of this migration was that it was for work in cities rather than in search of land and other agricultural opportunities (work in

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tea gardens or herding cattle). It started with Nepalis from the far-west of Nepal migrating, in circular fashion, to Indian cities or to nearby Indian districts to work as labourers on roads and building projects. The far west is the poorest and least fertile part of Nepal where seasonal migration for work has long been part of household survival strategies, with those capable of 'eating outside' absenting themselves for six to eight months of the year. They are famous as doormen (*chowkidars*) throughout India (they also work as porters, waiters, and other unskilled labour, as Sharma describes in Chapter 2 of this volume). Chain migration has meant that specific districts specialize in particular Indian cities: Bajhangis go to Bangalore, for example (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1995). High-altitude populations of Tibetan ethnicity for whom trade between Tibet and the lowlands had been part of their livelihood were also obliged, when the Nepal–Tibet border was closed in 1959, to adapt by spending longer in India, often working as urban peddlers and street traders. Manangis (Nyishangbas), from north central Nepal, were given special permission in the 1960s by King Mahendra to trade in Southeast Asia, though in fact this was a recognition of trading links that were much older (van Spengen 2000: 173–200; Ratanapruck 2007). Many Nepalis from all over western Nepal have gone to Delhi, Mumbai, and other Indian cities in recent decades (Sharma 2007, Chapter 2 in this volume; Thieme 2006; Thieme and Müller-Böker 2004). Officially, both India and Nepal insist that one can have only one nationality. Many of their citizens are ahead of them in this, happily holding ration cards and voting in Delhi while also returning to Nepal to vote in general elections there.[9]

The total number of people of Nepali origin in India has often been wildly exaggerated, either by the literary activists seeking official recognition of Nepali under Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution or by those wishing to legitimate the actions of the Bhutanese state in expelling Lhotshampas. The difficulty of distinguishing temporary from permanent migrants (see Chapter 2 below) encourages such inflated figures. One more sober estimate made in the mid-1990s

9 Sijapati (2014: 256–7) indicates that holding dual nationality in practice without admitting it to the Nepalese state is common among Nepalis in the USA also. See also, the discussion of dual nationality in Chapter 18 of this volume.

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put the figure at between 1.5 and 2.25 million (Hutt 2008: 106–7). Today the NRN organization posts a figure of five million Nepalis in all the SAARC countries (most would be in India).

MODERN LABOUR AND EDUCATION MIGRATION

A distinct third wave of labour migration began in the 1980s and gathered strength in the 1990s, with middlemen and manpower offices in Kathmandu and Nepalganj arranging for men (and a few women) to find work in the Gulf countries (Bruslé 2010, 2012a–d; Chapters 8 and 9 in this volume), Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, and South Korea.[10] Others managed to migrate on to Europe, Japan (Yamanaka 2000, 2007), Australia, New Zealand, and North America by either going for studies, or by joining relatives, or by travelling illegally and then claiming asylum (see Chapters 10–12 below on New York and other US destinations). A dark side to this movement of labour migration has been the trafficking of Nepali women to brothels in India, though the extent and the definition of the phenomenon remain controversial (Hausner 2005).

Nepalis are one of the fastest growing ethnic minorities in the UK (Adhikari 2012). A few arrived already in the 1970s and 80s: among them, there are around 300 Nepali doctors working for the National Health Service. Although the 2001 census recorded only 5,938 people born in Nepal, this was certainly an underestimate. The Centre for Nepal Studies, UK carried out a detailed survey of 18,801 Nepalis, and a larger more schematic survey of all larger settlements, during 2008 on the basis of which they estimated the total Nepali population in the UK to be 72,173 (the 2011 UK census recorded 60,202 Nepalis in England and Wales). An increasing number of Nepali men serving in the British Army and their families along with a growing number of students, nurses, and other professionals are settling in London, Manchester, Reading, and towns close to army bases (Ashford and Folkestone in Kent, Farnborough and Aldershot in Hampshire—an

[10] Graner (2008) links the government's encouragement of foreign labour migration in the mid-1990s to the collapse of Nepalese carpet exports to Germany following allegations on TV that the majority of those producing the carpets were children.

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echo of settlement patterns in India). The first Nepali local councillor (Dhan Gurung, an ex-Gurkha) was elected (for the Liberal Democrats) in 2007 to Folkestone Council and, as documented by Adhikari and Laksamba in Chapter 13 (p. 322 below), many more have followed his lead.

Campaigns for greater UK residency and pension rights have been going on for many years. From 2008 the campaign for all ex-Gurkhas to have the right to settle in the UK was fronted by the actress Joanna Lumley, whose father had been a major in the 6th Gurkha Rifles. In April 2009 the government was defeated in the House of Commons on the issue. The following month it conceded the right for all ex-Gurkhas with four years' service (not just those retiring post 1997 when the brigade's headquarters were moved from Hong Kong to the UK and not just those with 'special personal links') to settle in the UK.

Over 400 Nepali organizations have sprung up in the UK. A few are overtly religious, but many more define themselves by ethnicity (for example, Tamu Dhee [Gurung] Association UK, Thakali Samaj UK, Kirat Rai Yayokkha UK, and others) or (a more recent trend) in terms of a district or smaller region in Nepal (for example, Gulmi Zilla Samaj UK—bringing together people from Gulmi district, or the Mauja Bijaypur Samaj UK —based on two villages near Pokhara). Other organizations are simply local community organizations for all Nepalis in a given town or borough of the UK (for example, Burnt Oak Nepali Samaj, London, Sussex Nepalese Society, or Greater Rushmoor Nepalese Community which brings together Nepalis in the Aldershot and Farnborough area). There are also some professional organizations (for example, Nepalese Doctors Association UK and various ex-Gurkha organizations). In addition there are other organizations that aim to speak for or to all Nepalis in the UK, such as Nepali Samaj UK, Yeti Association UK, NRNAUK, and so on.[11]

Table 1.1 shows that the ethnic/caste make-up of the UK population is subtly different from that in the home country. Dalits, Muslims, and inhabitants of the Tarai are very under-represented; 'high' castes are somewhat under-represented; Magars, Gurungs, Rais, and Limbus—the groups favoured for recruitment to the British Gurkhas—are all

[11] On Nepali associations in the UK, see Adhikari (2012); Campbell (2014); F. Gurung (2015); Gellner et al. (2014: 144–5).

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over-represented with the Gurungs' proportion nine times that of their population of Nepal. Ethnic breakdown figures for the USA are not available, but it is likely that there is not the same degree of bias towards Gurungs and other Gurkha groups. It is also very likely that the average levels of education and income are higher among US Nepalis, given that so many middle-class and elite Nepalis go every year to the USA for college study and then stay on to work (the same may apply to Nepalis in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand). The contrasts between different groups in New York and Washington DC, on the basis of education and ethnicity, are brought out in Chapters 10, 11, and 12 below.

Between them, the diaspora in India and the more recent diaspora populations around the world have contributed enormous remittances that have effectively kept Nepal going as an economy through the disastrous lost years of civil war (1996–2006).[12] This was precisely the time at which export-oriented manufactures (garments, carpets) went into decline, tourism stagnated, and investment in hydro power (for years lauded as the country's future) stalled.

In the 1990s and 2000s a series of diasporas within the diaspora began to emerge, paralleling, and contributing to, the process of ethnicization within the home country (Gellner et al. 2008; Gurung 2015; Minami 2007). Thus in countries with substantial Nepali populations there emerged organizations speaking for all the major ethnic groups. Since 1990 these ethnic groups are known as Janajatis (the Hindi term that was created to translate the English 'tribe'; Nepali activists prefer to translate the word back into English as 'nationality' following the Chinese nomenclature for minorities). These diasporic ethnic organizations formed international links and networks among themselves (Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Rai, Limbu, Newar, Thakali; latterly Madheshis and Dalits, who are not normally considered Janajatis, have also organized). Alongside these, organizations in which membership was open to all regardless of ethnicity—regional organizations and local organizations (local to the 'host' country), as well as professional and party political organizations, as noted

[12] On remittances, see Adhikari (2001); Graner and Gurung (2003); Seddon et al. (2002); and Singh (2006).

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above in the UK example—were very common as well. In all these new associations, the facilitating role of the internet and other new technologies has often been crucial (Bruslé 2012a, 2012b). These ethnic distinctions have their historical roots in caste, which has certain consequences, often denied, for those at the bottom of the prestige hierarchy, as Mitra Pariyar shows in Chapter 17.

Just as the ethnic make-up of the diaspora population is subtly different from that of the homeland, so also religious affiliation is rather different. Nepal was an officially Hindu kingdom from 1962 to 2006, and for long before 1962 Hinduism had formed a central part of the rulers' and the elite's legitimation, both in their own eyes and in those of the ruled. Since the late 1980s anti-brahminism has formed a part of the Janajati movement and activists have campaigned for Magars and Tharus (who have no history of Buddhist affiliation) to return themselves as Buddhists in national censuses, rather than as Hindus. Gurungs, who have traditionally had multiple religious affiliations, are now more than ever inclined to return themselves as Buddhists. One consequence of this politicization and ethnicization of religious identity is that while the proportion of Buddhists in Nepal has risen from a state-manipulated 5.3 per cent in 1981 to 10.7 per cent in 2001, the proportion within the UK population is more like 29.3 per cent, with a further 9.2 per cent saying they are Hindu-Buddhist and 2.3 per cent saying they are Kirant-Buddhist (Hausner and Gellner 2012; Gellner et al. 2014). Hindus are still the largest single group at 41.4 per cent (roughly half their 80.6 per cent total in the 2001 Nepal census) (figures from CNSUK survey 2008).

With the blossoming of diverse groups, new coordinating organizations began to appear, both at national and international levels, aiming to bring them all together. A worldwide NRN organization was set up at a meeting in London in August 2003 and it was formally launched in Kathmandu the following October. As described in detail in Chapter 18, initial leadership was provided by Upendra Mahato, who had gone to the USSR as a student in the 1980s and is now one of the leading manufacturers of electronics in Russia and Belarus (one of many successful Nepali entrepreneurs in Russia). Thanks to NRN lobbying an NRN Bill was passed in Nepal in August 2007—it defined NRNs as any Nepali living in a non-SAARC country for more than two years, whether holding Nepali or foreign citizenship.

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By 2009 there were affiliated NRN national associations in 55 countries, including such unexpected locations as Lesotho and Libya. At the Fourth NRN Global Conference in Kathmandu in October 2009 Mahato, having served two three-year terms, stood down and was replaced as President of the Association by Dev Man Hirachan from Japan.

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The case studies in this volume amply illustrate, for the first time between the covers of one volume, the very diverse kinds of Nepali diaspora population now in existence around the world. The diaspora is simultaneously old and new. Some Nepali communities date from the era of the British Raj, when, as Sakya points out in Chapter 5, many people were (and remain to this day in places like Thailand) under the misapprehension that Nepal was a part of the British Empire. The most far-flung example is the Nepali population of Fiji whose ancestors went there along with numerous Biharis and southern Indians as indentured labourers (Chapter 6). They retain today some of the culture, and the self-identity, of being Nepali, without the language. The Nepali populations of Southeast Asia, though they reached their current destinations by different routes, belong to the same period.

The second kind of diaspora is formed by the labouring populations living in Indian cities, as described by Jeevan Sharma in Chapter 2. A third kind is a more modern transformation of this category, namely the workers in the Gulf evocatively described by Stirr and Bruslé in Chapters 8 and 9. In the Gulf countries, Nepalis find themselves at the bottom of a racialized hierarchy of roles, paid less than workers from other countries for the same work. They are the bottom rung of a nationally divided global proletariat (as indeed they are in India). Perhaps this very situation is what generates unprecedented solidarity and equality between Gulf-based Nepalis themselves, with internal caste and ethnic, and even regional, divisions having much less importance than they do back home in Nepal. Nepalis in the Gulf can legitimately be seen as a modern version of the indentured labourers who ended up in Fiji at the end of the nineteenth century.

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A fourth category are the diaspora populations, the largest of which is in the UK but found also in India, produced by Gurkha soldiers who decided to settle outside Nepal. These are described in the chapters by Adhikari and Laksamba, Shrestha and Gellner, Gurung, and Pariyar (Chapters 13, 14, 16, and 17). A fifth category is that of highly skilled migrants who are able to migrate to 'big' countries as doctors, nurses, and computer technicians. A sub-category of this fifth type are those who are able to go abroad as students and end up staying on to work and settle (Chapters 10, 11, 12, and 16). A recent monograph by Hamal Gurung (2015), based on a sample of 35 Nepali women in Boston and New York, examines how for many educated Nepali women arriving in the USA, usually motivated by the desire to improve their children's life chances, the only practical way to find work is move into the informal care economy, thereby experiencing, for themselves, a kind of downward mobility.

As illustrated in several places in this book, processes of ethnogenesis, the emergence of strong new identities within the Nepali diaspora, can, where the population is sufficiently high to support it, proceed faster and further in diaspora than they do in the homeland.[13] These processes are transnational, and are far from proceeding in isolation. Circuits of ideas, whether of Janajati affirmation (Chapters 3, 10, 14, and 15), of music (Chapters 8 and 19), or food (Chapter 7), include multiple countries and destinations.

In the final chapter, Kathryn March, on the basis of many decades' deep knowledge, considers the impacts of diaspora and migration on the home country through a focus on one Tamang village. She emphasizes the gendered nature of that experience, with women noticeably more vulnerable than men to the cultural shifts entailed by moving to town and new forms of sociality. She also shows how, despite the manifold and quite dramatic social and cultural changes, some deeper cultural patterns of gendered behaviour persist.

There are several instructive similarities and contrasts between the Nepali diaspora and the Indian diaspora. The first and second

[13] Gellner et al. (2014), by contrasting the British with the Belgian case, show how internal differentiation happens much less where the population is relatively low.

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waves of migration from Nepal were variations on wider South Asian migration processes, but the link to a distinct nation-state has generated different pathways and identifications. The third wave of migration has produced some populations that may count as diaspora communities and others (in the Gulf) that may not. Compared to India, these massive movements in Nepal have happened more suddenly and are more influential on the home society. In terms of absolute numbers there are fewer Nepalis migrating; but as a proportion of their society they are much more sizeable and the effect on the home society is correspondingly larger. Certain parts of India (in Gujarat or Kerala, for example) may be similar. Just as in India, many members of Nepal's elite have relatives—cousins, sons, and daughters—in the USA.

The relation to the host nation-state is crucial and the position of Nepali diaspora communities varies according to country. For most in diaspora the link to the homeland is valued. When speaking English the ethnonyms 'Nepalese' and 'Nepali' are used and are mostly uncontentious. (Not entirely so, however: a few intellectuals dislike 'Nepalese' and believe that it is somehow stigmatizing; on the other hand, some ethnic activists positively prefer it, in order to distinguish ethnic/national identity from the name of the language.) By contrast, for those living in India, the link to Nepal is highly sensitive and must be downplayed; the very self-identification as a diaspora population is and must be avoided. Instead of 'Nepali', with its link to a neighbouring nation-state, the older term 'Gorkhali' or 'Gorkha', which is archaic in most contexts elsewhere, is preferred (Hutt 2008; Subba 2008).

The assertiveness and degree of organization on the part of diaspora activists is greater where multiculturalism is favoured, at least in practice if not in official discourse (for example, in the UK or USA), compared to countries where it is more frowned upon (for example, Japan). The position of Nepalis in India is particularly difficult, because, however many generations they have lived there, they are seen as coming from a foreign country and are vulnerable to vicissitudes in Nepal-India relations. Indra Bahadur Rai, himself an outstanding Nepali Indian poet, writes about another such poet, Agam Singh Giri: "Giri dealt with the keynote of Nepalese life in India – the search for self-identity. Nepalis are a martial but maligned race; they

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have all along been fighting other men's battles; it is not at all pleasant to be branded as 'mercenaries of war'" (Rai 2009: 179).

Tanka Subba concludes his autobiographical survey:

> Whether or not to go back to Nepal has never been an issue for consideration of the Indian Nepalis. Most of them are born in India and have no memories—collective or otherwise—of Nepal. They have neither visited Nepal nor do they particularly wish to do so. They may be poor, starving, and living under inhuman conditions in India. They may be harassed and humiliated at immigration check-gates or elsewhere in Northeast India. Some rowdy local boys may empty their milk cans or slap them on the street. Yet they cannot think of going back for they have nowhere to go. (Subba 2008: 230–1)

Brubaker (2005: 7) points out that any diaspora worth its name has to last beyond a generation—if second and subsequent generations are wholly assimilated, then it is not a diaspora. Much of the Nepali diaspora in India passed this test long ago. Only time will tell whether the Nepali diaspora elsewhere persists, but the much older diaspora communities from other parts of South Asia suggest that it will.

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PART I

THE OLD DIASPORA: SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND BEYOND

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2

MARGINAL MIGRANTS? MIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF NEPALI MIGRANT WORKERS IN INDIA

Jeevan R. Sharma

IN APRIL–MAY 2012, I MADE a research trip to New Delhi in India. In my effort to trace migrants from particular source areas in the western hills of Nepal, I ended up spending several days in a *juggi* (slum community) in an eastern part of Delhi.[1] Most migrants in the *juggi* were from Palpa and adjoining districts of Nepal, such as Syangja, Arghakhanchi, Gulmi, and Rolpa. They worked as factory workers, hotel workers, and domestic workers; a few were also petty entrepreneurs with small businesses such as running corner shops and the making and selling of momos. A large proportion of them were

[1] I would like to thank Keshav Bashyal of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for accompanying me in the fieldwork in Delhi. This chapter has benefited from his extensive networks and knowledge of Nepali migrants and migrant associations in Delhi.

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Magars; others were from different caste groups, including Bahuns, Dalits, and Chhetris.

A Magar man aged 40—let's call him Shyam—ran a small grocery shop in the slum with his wife; they spoke to each other in the Magar language. They invited me to the 'party office', which was a couple of yards away from their shop. The office housed the city committee of the Maoist Party-aligned Mul Prabah Akhil Bharat Nepali Ekta Samaj (literally, 'mainstream united India–Nepal unity association'), but since the party split in 2011 the office had become the central office of the new faction named 'Nepali Ekta Samaj Bharat'. The office was a *pakka* room, made up of bricks and cement, and had been constructed using donations of material and labour from local Nepali migrants living in that community. In the office one could see a couple of loud speakers, several banners, two electric fans, a bookshelf, six chairs, a bed, musical instruments such as a *madal* (Nepali drum), a spare carpet, and Nepali baskets. The bookshelf was full of publications, including magazines, newsletters, pamphlets, and literature written in Nepali; there were books on topics such as identity, ethnicity, migration, federalism, and political parties in Nepal. The wall had pictures of four Nepalis who had been killed or had died in India, and a framed registration certificate of the organization under the Societies Registration Act of 1860.

Shyam gave me a yellow pamphlet and invited me to join a rally and public demonstration in Jantar Mantar, a dedicated area for protests in Delhi, on 29 April 2012. The rally was organized by his party and the dissident members of the Baidya faction of the Maoist party, collectively called Samyukta Jansangharsha Samiti (or Joint People's Struggle Committee). Shyam was an active member of his party and was responsible for organizing people from the Okhla area of Delhi. He was able to take time out for political and community activities as he did not have full-time job, and his source of income was the small shop that he managed with his wife. Although Shyam was not a 'whole-timer' cadre of his party, he devoted time to the party's activities in Delhi, and to other local community activities, such as organizing picnics, festivals, religious ceremonies, and sports events, as well as collecting funds for small-scale social work activities and festivals back in the village in Nepal.

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Figure 2.1 Preparing the truck before heading to Jantar Mantar for a demonstration.

Source: J. Sharma (29 April 2012).

The demonstration on 29 April was organized to call for the "timely writing of a federal republican constitution of Nepal" (see Figure 2.2). Around 11.45 a.m., about 40 people began to gather in front of the settlement, including women and children. The organizers had hired a truck for Rs 1,500 to take people from there to Jantar Mantar. A few young boys took the red cloth banner reading 'Nepal Ekta Samaj' from the office and attached it to the front of the truck. A carpet was laid on the truck floor so that people could sit; two microphones were rigged up and the youths brought the *madal* drum from the office. The truck took about forty Nepalis from the community and headed to Jantar Mantar, a site conventionally used for political protests in Delhi, which was about an hour's drive away. They sang and played drum in the back of the truck as they went to take part in the demonstration. In Jantar Mantar, Nepali migrants had arrived in trucks from different parts of Delhi, as well as from areas adjoining

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Figure 2.2 Demonstration at the Jantar Mantar calling for the new federal republican constitution in Nepal.

Source: J. Sharma (29 April 2012).

Delhi such as Haryana and Faridabad. After a 30-minute rally in the dedicated area, guarded heavily by Indian police, the crowd of about 400 gathered in a corner and began to listen to speeches. In addition to the rural migrants, Nepali journalists based in Delhi and Nepali postgraduate students studying in Delhi stood to one side of the gathering as spectators.

The speeches delivered by various leaders, the placards, and the pamphlets distributed, covered many contentious issues on state restructuring within Nepal and also India–Nepal relations. Some slogans called for the scrapping of the India–Nepal Treaty of 1950 and other 'unequal' treaties. Others demanded an end to the "encroachment of Nepali land" and "terror in the border areas caused by the Indian security forces". Although the stated objective of the public demonstration was to apply pressure for the "timely writing of the constitution in Nepal", the speakers spent much of their time

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Figure 2.3 Listening to speeches at the Jantar Mantar, Delhi.

Source: J. Sharma (29 April 2012).

speaking against India's political and economic hegemony in Nepal. This is not surprising given that Nepal's communist parties, including the Maoists, have a long history of political mobilization based on nationalistic anti-India rhetoric (Sharma 2010).

This ethnographic sketch illustrates how Nepali migrants in India mobilize collectively in order to engage with political processes in their homeland, Nepal. As I shall argue, although a small number of Nepali migrants have made attempts to integrate in India by acquiring official documents such as passports, voting cards, and other documentation such as ration cards, most of them speak of their migration as temporary and display a strong attachment to their homeland. The reality is that many of them spend most of their life circulating between their homes in Nepal and India until they decide finally to retire back in Nepal. This attachment to the homeland is demonstrated in many ways: by sending remittances on a regular basis, the use of the Nepali language in everyday conversation, the pattern of living together with

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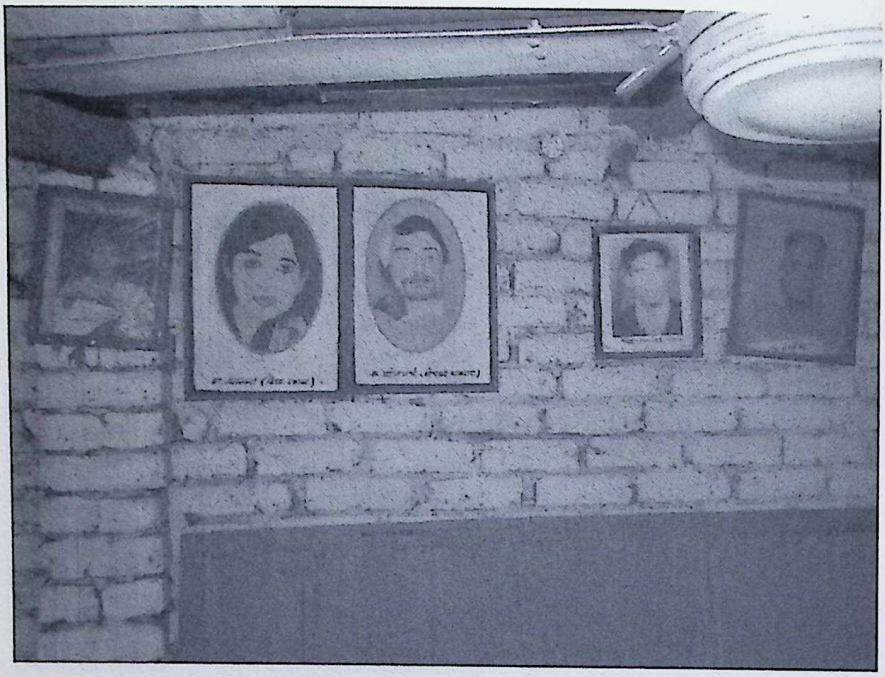

Figure 2.4 The Vaidya faction's city committee office in Okhla, Eastern Delhi, with portraits of 'martyrs', that is, comrades who were killed in The People's War.

Source: J. Sharma (28 April 2012).

fellow Nepalis from the same areas/regions, various social, communal and religious events, continual political engagement with political processes in Nepal (as demonstrated not only by the kind of mobilization described earlier, but also in their voting behaviour when many of them return home to cast their vote), regular conversations on Nepali politics, reading and listening to news on Nepali politics, as well as participation in different political events. Given India's direct influence in Nepali political processes, Nepali migrant associations make use of their strategic presence in Delhi to influence Nepal's political processes.

Based on my fieldwork among such migrants from the western hills, this chapter offers an overview of Nepali migrant workers in India with a particular emphasis on their economic and social life in the destination country. I argue that the various structural factors—such as significant economic inequality in Nepal—create the

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conditions for the outflow of able-bodied men and women. Over the years, this has created a culture of migration in the hills of Nepal. Further, the humiliating experience of border-crossing in a supposedly unique arrangement of an 'open border' (Hausner and Sharma 2013) produces a particular type of docile migrant worker. Nepali men find work at the bottom of the ladder in India. These phenomena, I suggest, shape the marginal 'classed' and non-citizen position of Nepali migrants in India. Nepali migrants in Delhi adopt a number of strategies, such as engaging in particular kinds of consumption activities, organizing themselves as community, and engaging in homeland political processes, as a way of dealing with their felt marginality. Additionally, Nepali migrant organizations and their activism in India shape the political consciousness of Nepali migrants, whose awareness of India's influence on politics and development in Nepal is heightened through their membership. The organizations provide migrants with an opportunity to take part in homeland political processes. However, their place at the bottom of the class hierarchy and their lack of citizenship, plus their limited experience in education and political networks, means that they are not in a position to organize to improve their own working conditions, and the political parties seem to be uninterested in doing that. They are, in short, very different from the educated, middle-class, advanced-country migrants who make up the Non-Resident Nepali (NRN) movement.

STRUCTURAL CONTEXT

A tentative picture of the structural context that enables a steady flow of labour from the western hills of Nepal to different parts of India will set the scene. While it is difficult to ascertain a clear statistical figure for Nepali migrants in India, estimates vary between 0.5 to 5 million.[2] Although the proportion of Nepali workers going to India

[2] For a useful discussion on the difficulties of ascertaining the number of Nepali migrants in India, see Hutt (2008). According to the 2001 Census of Nepal, there were a total of 589,050 Nepalis in India and the Indian Census of 2001 gives a similar figure of 596,696. Nepali migrant associations estimate that there are between 1.3 and 5 million Nepalis working in India (Thieme 2006: 32).

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has decreased from 80 per cent in 2001 to 41 per cent in 2009 (World Bank 2011), mainly due to the emergence of other migrant destinations following the second wave of labour migration to the Gulf states and East Asia, India remains an important destination for poorer households in Nepal's western hills.

Migration in search of work has a long history in Nepal. A combination of state policies and agrarian change in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries forced peasants in the hills to seek livelihoods elsewhere, either within Nepal or across the border in India (Regmi 1978; Sharma 2007). Young men's migration in search of work started with recruitment to serve in the army of the Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh, and then into the British Army in India (Seddon et al. 2001). In addition to state policies on land and labour, population growth, climate variation, market expansion, and the idea of *bikas* (development) have all put tremendous pressure on communities living in rural hills (Blaikie et al. 2002; Jodha 2005; Macfarlane 2001). One of the most common household responses in the hills has been to intensify the historical practice of out-migration in search of work opportunities. After a re-study, Blaikie et al. (2002) concluded that migrant remittances had played an even more important role in contributing to sustaining rural life than their original study of 1970s had indicated. Their longitudinal observations demonstrate the overwhelming and longstanding significance of labour migration for household livelihoods in the middle hills.

The unique open border arrangement between the two countries, formalized by the Nepal–India Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950, allows citizens of both countries to cross the border without having to produce official documents and offers equal treatment to all Nepali and Indian citizens. Despite such provisions, the open border is not quite so open when seen from the perspective of labour migrants who cross the border. As discussed elsewhere (Hausner and Sharma 2013), migrating labourers, although initially excited, are disciplined and humiliated at the border by both formal and informal gatekeepers as a way of producing low-wage earners in India. Although the unique arrangement between Nepal and India allows Nepali migrants to travel across the border into India (and vice versa) and earn their livelihoods without having to produce any documentary evidence, it also means that Nepali migrants in India constitute an ambiguous

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category that is neither native nor alien. This ambiguous category makes Nepali migrants more susceptible to exploitation and ill treatment, and they are often left without access to justice that is otherwise available to native or other foreign nationals.

The per capita rate of remittances from India appears to be far lower than the number of migrants would suggest (only about 20 per cent of Nepal's total remittance flow comes from India). Yet it is significant because of its direct contribution to household livelihoods of the poorer section of the population. Thus, its significance lies not in its volume, but in the fact that these remittances go to the poorest households. Migration to India is for subsistence work; it rarely facilitates upward social mobility but rather helps the household to manage everyday survival needs (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1995), and in particular contributes to subsistence farming.

Fieldwork on men's migration to India suggests that economic and structural compulsions determine their decisions about migration. However, the choices migrants make are also embedded in socio-cultural norms, meanings, and expectations, and in particular in gendered ideas of obligation to support the household and to adventure. The decision to leave for work in India is far from being a question purely of economic calculation. For young men from the poorer households in the mid-western hills of Nepal, going to India is often an escape from the regimented order of village life and a way to achieve a certain degree of personal autonomy through experiencing a distant world.[3] From the perspective of young men, travelling to India is not just about finding employment, but also about seeking

[3] In mainstream social science discourses, including anthropology and agrarian studies, the peasantry is largely seen as rooted in the soil and immobile. In this imaginary, there is no reason to look for employment outside the peasant mode of existence (Kearney 1996). The category of peasant hardly fits twentieth–twenty-first century realities, when most of the people whom we call peasants are part-time workers in the informal economy in cities and who make sense of their migration experiences in socio-cultural terms. This delinking of the peasant from the soil and from agricultural resources has important implications for how one conceptualizes the production and reproduction of poverty in rural areas.

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excitement, independence, and material consumption away from the constrained life in the hills (Sharma 2008).

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE OF MARGINAL MIGRANTS IN INDIA

Not all Nepali migrant workers in India are poor or marginal, but most work in difficult and exploitative conditions. Some work in government, the police, the army, offices in the private sector, or run small enterprises. However, most Nepali migrants are employed to do domestic work or else have menial and low-paid jobs in the service sector, or in the manufacturing, construction, or agricultural fields. A few family units are also involved in running small enterprises, such as making momos and running food stalls selling 'Chinese food'. In this chapter I draw on fieldwork among those who work in the informal service sector in cities, such as porters, hotel and restaurant workers, domestic workers, and factory workers in different parts of India, particularly in Delhi.[4]

Although contractors actively recruit seasonal labour from rural Nepal for road and house contruction in Uttarakhand and Himachal, all other forms of migration are organized and supported by kin networks. Over the years, social networks and inheritance have played a crucial role in sustaining the migration cycle between origin villages in Nepal's western hills and specific destinations in India (Bruslé 2008; Thieme 2006). Most migrants leave home for the first time in the company of close relatives. Social networks remain important not only for organizing migration but also for finding work and living together in India. In the destination, migrants from particular places often live together and their interactions are mainly limited to these worlds. Their movement between jobs and different places in India is facilitated by their kin networks. They spend a considerable time socializing together with fellow migrants from their home districts and similar caste/ethnic groups. Through these links they also take part in cultural, religious, entertainment, familial, community, and political activities.

4 Over the last decade, I have carried out fieldwork among Nepali migrants in different parts of India, including Mumbai, Delhi, Nainital, and Shimla.

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A few, such as domestic workers and watchmen, are provided with accommodation. But most Nepali migrants live in shared rooms in slums that are affordable to them. The small rooms are shared by several migrants. The shacks have corrugated iron roofs, they are very hot and humid, and do not always have toilet facilities in the vicinity. The slum I visited in the eastern part of Delhi had open drains and dirty and dusty roads.

The demand for Nepalis as watchmen and factory workers—these, along with agriculture in the rural areas in Punjab, have been the two most longstanding sources of employment in India—is generally declining. However, there is a steady demand for Nepali workers to work as hotel or restaurant workers, domestic workers, and manual labourers in road construction and porterage in different parts of India. A very small number take their families with them, but most migrants travel singly, leaving family members behind and sending them remittances. Shyam, for example, had all his family members back in Palpa. His wife came to join him a few years ago to seek medical treatment and later stayed with him in Delhi, while his son and two daughters remained with his brother and went to the village school in Palpa. While Shyam did try and bring his son and daughters to Delhi, he found it quite challenging to bring his children up in the slum environment, which, he felt, was not very safe for them. Family members left behind can look after the land and care for the children and elderly. Furthermore, the lack of accommodation and physical security in the destination city means that it is more practical (except in cases where medical treatment is sought) not to take family members or wives along.

The practice of migration for work in India often starts at a young age, and many continue to travel back and forth until they are old. Once unable to work further in India, old men retire back in their villages to be cared for by their families and children. With no wives or children accompanying them, and with the aspiration to "save here and eat there" (Watkins 2004), migrants often end up working long hours. As regular income is low and barely covers the costs of travel to and living in the destination, most must work overtime to enable them to save.

Commonly known as *chaukidar*, *gorkha*, or *bahadur*, those who work as watchmen are employed in private bungalows, housing

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colonies, government offices, factories, hospitals, or businesses. Commercialization of the security business under multinational companies, such as Group Four, has meant that the social networks that long formed the basis of a continuous supply of Nepali men to work as watchmen are slowly being replaced by formal procedures of recruitment. Watchmen work for up to 15–17 hours a day. Their monthly salary ranges anywhere between Rs 2,500 and 5,000 but they are able to earn more by working overtime and doing other work (such as taking children to school, cleaning cars, shopping, and so on) for the householders who are their employers, as well as getting occasional tips. Prakash, a Bahun man aged 30, who worked as a watchman in a housing colony in the eastern part of Delhi washes 22 cars and earns around Rs 3,000–3,500 in addition to his watchman salary. Despite the long working hours, the job of a watchman is valued because of the flexibility it provides to work overtime and earn more money. Watchmen are often provided with accommodation, which helps them save money. It also offers Nepali employees security of shelter and a sense of being recognized as capable and trustworthy persons.

Watchmen are usually given a uniform, a long stick, and a whistle. The job is considered easier than working in restaurants or as (internal) domestic help, which requires long hours of work often in difficult conditions. In the words of a middle-aged watchman, the job also involved loneliness as he spent most of his time standing at the gate, often with hardly anyone to talk to, except for the domestic workers staying in or visiting the building, or watchmen from the neighbouring building. It is almost impossible to get involved intimately with others. Working as a watchman was also discussed as difficult in cases where they were attacked by thieves, or were unable to catch burglars, which resulted instantly in the loss of the job or deductions from their salary for a few months.

An increasingly popular option for young Nepali men is to work as helpers or domestic workers in middle-class houses in cities and towns in India, which is known as 'working in *kothi*'. A small number of women also work as domestic workers. The work involves long hours for low wages, ranging anywhere between Rs 1,500 and Rs 3,000 per month. Often invisible, except when they leave the home for 2–3 hours day, those who work as domestic workers spend most of

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their time alone inside the apartment of their middle-class employers; like watchmen, the job involves loneliness. Owners put restrictions on workers, not allowing them to spend much time outside. Domestic workers spend most of their time preparing and cooking food, buying vegetables, cleaning dishes, cleaning the house, and washing clothes.

The men I spoke to did not complain about their work, although they did not see domestic help or working as helpers in hotels or restaurants as long-term jobs, and they hoped to find 'better' work (*ramro kam*) in an office. Amongst the migrants, working in 'kothi' was seen as a less respectable job and often a job that one ends up doing initially when no other work is available. A 30-year-old Dalit man from Arghakhanchi said, "I never work in kothi. I don't like kothi work because it is like working as a servant, it is not a job. I like to work where I am not treated as a servant." A 34-year-old Magar man, who initially worked in a kothi in the Vasantkunj area of Delhi, said that he earned so little while working that he was reluctant to share his salary. Having worked for 3–4 years, he was hired as a driver by the same 'owner' and is paid Rs 4,000 plus food and shelter. In a couple of cases, those who worked in kothi spoke of benefits of working for a 'good family'. A 50-year-old Chhetri man from Gulmi said that his wife was now looking after his owner's family in London and was paid Rs 25,000 per month along with full board and is provided with a flight home once every two years. He had already managed to buy a piece of land close to the town of Bhairahawa in Nepal from the money his wife had earned. Another Magar man, aged 34, spoke of how his previous owner had attempted to take him to the USA when he moved there, which he had hoped would transform his life, but his visa was rejected by the US Embassy in Delhi. Thus, despite its less respectable status, working as a domestic worker offers possibilities based on the patron–client relationship that are otherwise remote for poor and marginal migrants.

Just like domestic work, working in hotels and restaurants can be very demanding and is often the first resort for young men who end up in cities like Delhi. As with domestic work, hotel work involves long hours on a fixed salary, with a starting salary as low as Rs 1,500 (but going up to Rs 6,000). The work involves cleaning, chopping, cooking, and shopping for goods. It rarely involves going out of the hotel premises and often involves constant supervision by the employer

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or the supervisor. Young men were often employed in restaurants as helpers who worked as cleaners washing dishes or as assistants to a more experienced cook (or occasionally as cooks themselves). It was not uncommon to see cut marks and cracks on their hands. I saw four young boys chopping onions and cabbage, and washing dishes, for more than 12 hours a day on the first floor of a restaurant in central Delhi. A restaurant owner, himself a Nepali, who regularly employed Nepali workers said that it was becoming difficult for him to find Nepali workers to work for more than a couple of months. It was not uncommon for the recently arrived young boys to work for a few weeks or a couple of months in restaurants as helpers, where they were often paid a low salary, before they 'ran away', often without collecting the wages owed, in search of better jobs.

Several migrants, especially those who had good educational credentials, had found office jobs that had regular salary, job security, and fairly good working conditions. Working as office assistants was very common and sought after. Shyam had his wife's 19-year-old younger brother, Bishnu, staying with them; he worked as an office assistant in a courier company. Educated up to SLC, he earned a good salary of Rs 10,000. Bishnu completed schooling in Palpa and had come to Delhi a year earlier. His office had moved recently to Gurgaon from a nearby area, so he had to commute for about 1.5 hours from the eastern part of Delhi where they lived. His office hours were from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. in addition to at least 3 hours of commuting. He had tried moving to Gurgaon and sharing a room with a non-Nepali worker from Bihar, but he didn't like that arrangement, so he came back to his sister and brother-in-law. When I reached their home at 7.30 a.m. in the morning, Bishnu was already getting ready to go to his office. As I was chatting with him, he took a quick shower just outside their small room and got ready to go to work with an ironed shirt and trousers. He had a smartphone. He used fairness cream and body spray and combed his hair. By the end of 30 minutes of preparation, he looked the part of the smart and personable office worker.

In Uttarakhand and Himachal, Nepali migrants work as porters or as daily wage labourers on construction sites. In hill stations such as Nainital and Shimla, Nepali men, carrying 'ropes' and wearing Nepali caps (*topis*), are easily identifiable, usually to be seen waiting for employment by tourists who need their luggage carried.

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Nainital Kalyani Regimi Memorial Library

Nepali migrants are locally called Dotyals (literally meaning those from Doti district, but the term is used to refer to Nepali migrants who come to Nainital from the whole range of the mid-western and far-western hills of Nepal). They are self-employed, which gives them flexibility in terms of working hours but also puts them at risk if no work is available (for example, in bad weather). All the young men I met looked very weak, fatigued, and overworked. Most shared a room and lived together with other migrants from the same village. They cooked and ate together in their shared shacks. They had a regular routine. They worked (or looked for work) for the whole day in the market, waiting for someone to employ them. At 5 or 6 p.m. they went back to their rooms, cooked food collectively, ate, and slept. They earned between Rs 100 and 400 per day with an average daily income of Rs 150–200. Most of these migrants were particular about saving, although a few ended up spending hard-earned money on alcohol in the evening. They did not have bank accounts or a safe place in their rooms to keep their savings; they rather kept their earnings with a few 'trusted' shopkeepers for safety. The shopkeepers were very honest and they reported being able to retrieve their money whenever they wanted, sometimes with some interest. On average, a migrant might save about Rs 20,000 in a year.

In India in general, some Nepali migrants, as noted above for Delhi, start small business, like momo stalls or small corner shops. Running shops required investment and know-how which only a few migrants could afford and had the confidence to start. Initially, Shyam started with a tea stall in an annex of an office building, which was later closed. Later, he opened a small shop in the slum where he and fellow Nepalis lived with an investment of around Rs 150,000. For him, this was an opportunity to run a business of his own rather than working as an employee under others, which he had done for many years. He was hopeful that he would be able to open a shop back in his village in Palpa if and when he finally decided to go back.

Despite the constraints of life in India, from the perspective of all these men, the move to India also offered excitement. For instance, Mumbai was a city of big buildings, a massive transport system, sea, brothels, 'beer bars', freedom, and the film industry. Hill stations like Nainital and Shimla were towns full of tourists and money. Delhi had parks and shopping malls. Working in places like Mumbai, Delhi,

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and Nainital offered these men an opportunity to become involved in the consumption of what was considered modern experience. In their free time, they would engage in what is called *ghumna jane* (literally, to wander around), which involved exploring new places in shopping malls, market areas, or film shooting locations. Except for those who worked as domestic workers, television and movies were popular forms of entertainment among migrant men in Delhi. Whenever they could, young men watched films, entertainment serials, news, or cricket. They had up-to-date knowledge about the movies, movie stars, television serials, and celebrity gossip. When they had money, it was common for some men to engage in drinking and playing cards together.

Not only migrants who worked in big cities but also those who worked as porters invested their hard-earned savings in mobile phones from second-hand shops for Rs 2,000–3,000. Phones were used to make calls to their families back in Nepal, but also as music players. The widespread use of mobile phones shows the desire of these men to consume modern goods.

There is a palpable tension between what Nepali men desired and hoped for in terms of their obligations to contribute to household subsistence and their desire to be involved in up-to-date consumption practices. In the face of difficult living and working conditions in India, it is a challenge to fulfil their familial obligation to 'save here, eat there'. Earning is hard and so is resisting the temptations of cinema, television, mobile phones, wide roads, cars, beer bars, and shopping malls.

NEPALI MIGRANT ORGANIZATIONS

There is a long history of Nepali migrant organizations in India. Data on the exact number of associations and organizations of Nepali migrants in India is not available. The most prominent ones are the sister organizations of major Nepali political parties, although there are also active migrant associations along the lines of regional, district, and ethnic identities in addition to a number of others that work to promote the Nepali language and culture. More recently a few NGOs and development projects, such as Maiti Nepal and Saathi Nepal, have opened offices in India and have been active on issues

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relating to migration, including combating trafficking, rescuing trafficked minors, and raising awareness about the risks of HIV/AIDS among migrant populations.

Established in 1921, the Gorkha League is believed to be the first Nepali migrant organization established in India. The league was formed in order to organize Nepalis in India. In its early days it published a magazine called *Gorkha Sansar*, which did not continue for long. On 5 May 1966, communist leaders Pushpa Lal Shrestha and Ekdev Ale established the Akhil Bharat Pravasi Nepali Kalyankari Sangh ('All-India Expatriate Nepali Welfare Association'), which was the first organization to work systematically on Nepali migrant issues by raising awareness of migrants' problems and organizing migrant workers. Later, on 7 November 1979, the All-India Nepalese Migrants' Unity Society was established by communist leaders Nirmal Lama, Mohan Bikram Singh, and Chitra Bahadur K.C.; it has a strong Maoist ideology, and is considered to be the largest and most effective Nepali migrant organization in India.

As on previous occasions, Nepali migrants and their organizations offered a safe haven for exiled political leaders from Nepal during the royal coup of February 2005. Furthermore, as we have seen, they have been active in putting pressure to bring about political changes in Nepal, whether through promoting Nepali culture or language, overthrowing the Ranas, bringing multi-party democracy in 1990, or supporting the pro-democracy and anti-king demonstrations in 2005. The leaders of migrant associations in Delhi proudly spoke of their experience hosting Nepali politicians and providing them with shelter and food during difficult political periods in Nepal. A 43-year-old Bahun man from Gulmi, who ran a small restaurant, proudly shared his experience of hosting Nepali Congress leaders, including Sujata Koirala, in his place during the royal coup of 2005. Others spoke enthusiastically of their experiences hosting prominent leaders like Pradip Gyawali, Chitra Bahadur K.C., Nirmal Lama, and C.P. Gajurel among others. They demonstrated their connections to political leaders in Nepal by displaying the telephone numbers and their photos with these leaders in their mobile phones.

The activities of migrant organizations are closely linked to party politics in Nepal and are seen as the representative of their respective affiliated parties. Although known as migrant associations, very

Table 2.1 Profiles of party-affiliated Nepali migrant organizations in India

Name	Nepali Jan Sampark Samiti Bharat	Pravashi Nepali Sangh Bharat	Mulpravah Akhil Bharat Nepal Ekata Samaj	Akhil Bharat Nepal Ekata Samaj	Akhil Bharat Nepal Ekata Manch	Nepali Ekata Samaj Bharat
Established	1976	1966	1979	2009 (1979)	2012	2011
Registered	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Affiliation	Nepali Congress	CPN (UML)	CPN (Masal)	UCPN (Maoist)	UCPN (Maoist, Vaidya faction)	CPN (United)
Office	Mumbai, Delhi (rented)	Faridabad, Haryana (own)	Badarpur, New Delhi (own)	Shalimar Bagh, New Delhi (rented)	Unknown	Palpali Camp, Okhla, New Delhi (rented)
Total (estd) members	22,000	10,000	50,000	60,000	5,000	3,000
Membership fee	Rs 325	Rs 10	Rs 1	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
President (at the time of the field study)	Bal Krishna Pandey	Khem C. Dhakal	Durga KC	T.P. Pathak	Laxman Pant	Rishi Pun
Major Activities	Political, Festivals, Sports	Political, Festivals	Political, Festivals, Sports	Political, Festivals, Sports	Political	Political, Festivals, Sports
Other	13 State Committees	13 State and 109 city committees	10 State-level committees	Banned in India in 2002, but functioned as *Nepali Jana Adhikar Suraksha Samiti*		Split from Mulpravah on the issue of ethnicity

Source: Informant interviews and author survey.

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Table 2.2 Profiles of some non-party Nepali migrant organizations in India

Name	Sudur Paschim Sampark Manch	Nepali Samaj Sewa Samiti, Delhi	Pravasi Nepali Jan Kalyan Samiti	Help Nepali Mission	Lumbini Gautam Buddha Charitable Trust	Shree Pashupati Sampark Manch	Newar Samaj
Scope	India	India	India	India	India	India	India
Established	2004	2010	2005	2010	2010	2007	1995
Registered	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Affiliation	None	None	None	None	None	None	None
Members	350	250	80	40	50	Unknown	Unknown
President	Bir Bahadur Bohora	Ghanshyam Sharma	Omkar Sharma	Kavi Karki	Deepak GC	Tulasi Dhakal	Yam Bahadur Shrestha
Major Activities	social and cultural programmes	social and cultural programmes	social and cultural programmes	social and cultural programmes	social and cultural programmes	social and cultural programmes	social and cultural programmes
Other	Invited artists/ singers from Nepal; organized health camps in Nepal; sent solidarity letter to Akhand Sudur Paschim movement	Organized HIV awareness programme, sports events	Organized Teej programme in 2011; received support from Nepali Embassy	Rescue trafficked Nepali women and minors	Dance/song performance; free medical camp also organized. Received support from Nepali Embassy	Organized cultural programmes; supported children schooling; blood donation programme; distributed blankets	Celebration of festivals; includes Newars from both India and Nepal

Source: Informant interviews and author survey.

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rarely do they organize activities and programmes on the rights and the protection of migrants. Except for involvement in resolving minor disputes, the migrant associations have not worked on behalf of Nepali migrants to bargain with employers or owners in India. The migrant associations have neither networks nor leverage with trade unions or workers' organizations in India, nor do they have explicit political connections with Indian political parties. Except for those who vote in Indian elections and only a few who take part in election campaigns, most do not take an active part in Indian political processes and remain on the political margins in India, despite their relations to Nepali party politics.

The Nepali migrant associations organize demonstrations and rallies, carry out organization-building activities, raise funds through membership fees and occasional events for specific activities, arrange cultural programmes and concerts, and mobilize public opinion among Nepalis living and working in India. On a regular basis, local neighbourhood committees organize sports competitions, picnics, and celebrate Nepali festivals such as Dashain, Teej, Deusi-Bhailo, and Holi. Occasionally they raise funds to help fellow Nepalis if they have been robbed, lost their job, or need help in a family emergency. Political rallies, like the one described at the beginning of this chapter, are rare and only take place occasionally.

A few activists like Shyam spend more time in migrant organizations while others join on occasional or ad hoc basis. Shyam was active in politics back home in Palpa, and has regularly helped his party by collecting and providing donations and giving shelter to party workers during the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. He was recruited by a leader of the migrant association in Delhi, Bhakta Bahadur Pun, who wanted him, in turn, to recruit members in his neighbourhood. In addition to running his shop, Shyam spends his time managing the party office described above. He has a receipt book for membership dues and keeps a register of members in his neighbourhood, many of whom are from his village in Nepal and are related to him. Several migrants I spoke to were not active in the activities of migrant associations and the reasons given were that it was not useful and that they were only interested in collecting membership fees and party levy. Over the years, although diverse Nepali migrant associations have proliferated in India, the most active remain those who function as

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representatives of their respective Nepali political parties. Although they are migrant associations, they do not act as workers' unions or associations, and do not organize themselves as such. As discussed above, Nepali migrant associations do not participate in Indian political processes or activities; their main purpose is to mobilize in relation to politics in Nepal and most of their engagements are cultural activities. The non-political organizations have limited memberships of a few hundred at most. They focus primarily on cultural activities that bring people together such as blood donation camps, health camps, picnics, celebration of festivals, sports days, and song/dance performances. Over all, despite claims by migrant organizations about the large number of Nepalis in India, their coverage and membership seem to be limited.

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Pushed by difficult economic conditions at home, Nepalis have long relied on the comparatively large economy of their immediate neighbour, India, where they migrate in search of various work opportunities. To quote John Hitchcock, "an important aspect of the relationship between India and Central Nepal is the close connection arising from the stringencies of hill agriculture on the one hand and the cash value of Indian employment on the other" (1961: 15). The quest for livelihoods has sustained a culture of migration in the hills of Nepal. Most Nepali migrants are vulnerable to exploitation and ill treatment with no protection in India due to their marginal status. They work in precarious conditions and most receive insufficient wages to allow them to significantly improve their livelihoods. Opportunities for consumption in India that are unavailable in the hills of Nepal have provided powerful socio-cultural meanings that perpetuate this situation despite its being an exploitative arrangement in economic terms.

Multiple migrant associations exist in India to organize Nepali migrants and potentially to provide them with a level of protection. However, in practice, the activities and programmes of migrant associations are primarily aimed at political and cultural engagements with the homeland. The nature of collective mobilization of Nepali migrants in India under the banner of the associations suggests that they are not informed by their immediate practical needs in terms of

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improving their working and living conditions or their rights in India, but by their commitment to belonging in Nepal and to contributing to political processes there. Neither the political nor the non-political migrant associations appear to view Nepali migrants primarily as migrant workers; they do not seem to organize their activities in relation to the practical or political problems faced by Nepali migrants. The political migrant associations function as representatives of their respective political parties primarily interested in expanding their membership base. The cultural migrant associations are relatively small and are mainly informed by their sense of cultural belonging. The NGOs, human rights organizations, or trade unions active in India do not appear to recognize and document the exploitative working arrangements of Nepali migrants and their refleffects in terms of mundane ill treatment, unfair treatment, bodily harm, and poor pay among others. This could be due to predispositions related to the marginal position of Nepali migrant workers in India who occupy an invisible class and a liminal position of neither natives nor foreigners.

Unlike the Non-Resident Nepalis (NRNs), who have organized themselves to contribute to nation-building through economic investments (see Chapter 18 in this volume), the intent and the activities of Nepali migrant associations in Delhi remain political. Despite spending years living and working in India, most migrants remain attached to Nepal's political processes. Apart from the contributions made by individual migrants to their household livelihoods, Nepali migrant associations in India are not actively involved in economic investments or development activities in their homeland. Nepali migrant associations offer a platform for political participation of economically marginal Nepali migrants who spend their life going to and fro between Nepal and India. The orientation of Nepali migrant associations that are exclusively occupied with Nepali political processes offers very little political space to improve the living and working lives of Nepali migrants in India.

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3

IDENTIFICATIONS, STATE CATEGORIZATIONS, AND RELIGIOUS CHANGES AMONG SIKKIMESE GURUNGS

Mélanie Vandenhelsken

SIKKIMESE GURUNGS' RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATIONS AND practices have been deeply transformed since the 1980s, especially in the religious field.[1] In 2006 almost 70 per cent of Gurungs identified themselves as Buddhists, whereas oral sources claim that they mostly used to declare themselves Hindus two decades earlier.[2] This echoes the recent developments in Nepal, due in part to Buddhist activists, such as the founders of the celibate Buddhist monasteries in Solu-Khumbu in the early twentieth century (Ortner 1989, especially Chapter 7) and supporters of the Theravada movement (Gellner 2010; LeVine and Gellner 2005). It is also due to ethnic activists who played an

[1] I thank David Gellner and Sondra Hausner for comments, corrections, and advice on this text. I take responsibility for any remaining errors.

[2] DESME (2006). See below for further details.

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instrumental role in the large-scale shift towards Buddhism in the frame of Nepal's Janajati movement.[3]

Here I explore the conditions of recent religious transformations in Sikkim using the case study of Gurung village religious practices that are carried out by ritual specialists called *ponjyo* or *u-may* (Tb. *dbu med*),[4] looking in particular at how they have changed in relation to ethnic activism. Ethnic activism that influences the religious field takes mainly place within the frame of claims for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status in Sikkim. Gurungs—included in the political category of 'Nepalese' and commonly and politically contrasted with Lepchas and Bhutias[5]—were included in the state category of Other Backward Classes (OBC) in 1994. OBC status came with other resources holding

[3] Several other authors have discussed the religious politics that forms part of the Nepalese 'indigenous nationality' (Np. *adivasi-janajati*) movement; see for example, Des Chene (1996), Fisher (2001), Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka, and Whelpton (2008), Gellner (2005, 2007, 2008), Hangen (2007, 2010) Lecomte-Tilouine and Dollfus (2003), Lawoti (2005), Letizia (2007, 2011, 2014), and Macfarlane (1989, 2008). On the politics of religious identification in the Nepali diaspora in Britain, see Hausner and Gellner (2012). Hangen's analysis of the Mongol National Organisation's influence on religious changes among Gurungs in Ilam district, near the Sikkim border (2010), is of particular relevance for a comparison with the data presented here.

[4] Tibetan words are transcribed in a simple form as well as transliterated with the Wylie (1959) system at the first occurrence of the word (only the simple form is used at other occurrences); they are preceded by 'Tb.' Nepali words are transcribed with diacritics following the spelling provided by Turner (1980); they are indicated by 'Np.' Words in Gurung are indicated by 'G.'

[5] The Lepchas are indigenous to Sikkim and the Bhutias founded the kingdom of Sikkim in the seventeenth century, which was annexed by India in 1975 and then became a state of the Indian Union. Among recent works on Sikkim from historical and anthropological perspectives, see among others, Arora (2007), Balikci (2008), Basnet (1974), Bentley (2011), Bray (2011), Datta-Ray (1980), Hiltz (2003), Lachungpa (2011), Lepcha (2011), Little (2008), Mullard (2011), Nakane (1966), Roy Burman (2001), Shneiderman (2011, 2015), Shneiderman and Turin (2006), Siiger (1967), Sinha (1975), Steinmann (1998a, 1998b), Subba (2013).

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out the promise of a repositioning of the group within Sikkimese society. This project was soon reinforced through the support of the new Sikkim government elected in 1994. It began a process of re-ranking seven of the eight members of the OBCs into the more advantageous category of ST.[6] In order to satisfy the criteria to qualify as ST, Gurungs adjusted and reorganized their self-identificatory practices. Among Gurungs, ethnic activism and the political struggle to obtain ST status are led by the All Sikkim Gurung [Tamu] Buddhist Association (ASGTBA).[7]

I will focus here on the combined role of interactions between, first, state categories and groups' self-identifications, second, competing sections within the ethnic group, and third, the back and forth mobility between Sikkim and Nepal in the transformation of Sikkimese Gurungs' religious practices since the 1980s. As regards the first point, in line with several scholars (Brubaker 2004; Hausner and Gellner 2012), my case study highlights the dialectical interplay between self and external identifications (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 15) in the making of ethnic groups' boundaries. I attempt to show the complexity of these interactions, which are not limited to a negotiation between the state and the Gurungs, but include power relations within the ethnic group, in particular between religious and

[6] It has, however, been clear since 1994 that the OBC category was conceived as a bridge towards the ST category, as the then newly elected Chief Minister Chamling revealed in his opening address to the Assembly (Proceedings of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly, first session, fifth assembly, 29 December 1994: 14). In 2003, the groups declared OBC between 1995 and 2000 were declared Most Backward Classes (MBC) at the Sikkim State level (except for the Limbus and Tamangs, declared ST the same year). In 2004, a commission was set up by the government of Sikkim to examine the feasibility of including the then MBC into the ST category; this concerned the seven following groups: Bhujel, Dewan, Gurung, Rai, Mangar, Sunuwar, Thami, and Jogi.

[7] The term 'Tamu' is the ethnonym that the most politically active Gurungs have chosen to call themselves, as opposed to the term 'Gurung', which is how they are known by outsiders; Tamu-Kwyi is the name of the contemporary Gurung language (Macfarlane 2008). The ASGTBA includes both 'Gurung' and 'Tamu' in its title and acronym, with parentheses or brackets around 'Tamu' in the title.

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political activists, and are nourished by people's mobility between Nepal and India.

I argue here that, during the last phase of N.B. Bhandari's government (1979–94)[8] and since P.K. Chamling's election in 1994, the 'shift' to Buddhism (Hangen 2010: 132–51; hereafter 'buddhization') in Sikkim is merely the outcome of ethnic activism as part of the struggle for re-ranking within the reservation system; historical evidence additionally reveals that Buddhism was not developed earlier among 'Sikkimese Nepalese groups', despite the last Sikkimese king's encouragements when trying to construct a Sikkim national identity in the 1960s (Hiltz 2003). More recently, the interpretation, appropriation, and contestation of state categories, as well as the inner power struggle between Gurung sub-groups, has not only kept the process of self-identification in motion, but is also leading to cultural changes, in particular in the religious field.

This study took place in the two hamlets with the highest proportion of Gurung inhabitants of the south Sikkim village of Yangang: Pathing and Gurung Gaon ('Gurung village'). Gurung families have been migrating to the village from the end of the nineteenth century right up to the present. This village has been in the public eye primarily because it was the birthplace of the current Sikkim Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling. As a result, Yangang has been selected for several large economic development projects.[9]

BUDDHIST POLITICS IN SIKKIM

B.B. Gooroong[10] reported to me that the last king of Sikkim told his grandfather, "You Gurungs are Tibetan, so you should be Buddhists." This statement has been used to support the politics of buddhization among Gurungs led by the ASGTBA since the 1990s. It also referred

[8] I give a simplified version of Bhandari's time in government, which was actually interrupted from May 1984 to March 1985.

[9] In addition, Yangang has been studied by the sociologist Sandhya Thapa (2002).

[10] Chief Minister of Sikkim in May 1984, the political advisor to the Chief Minister from 1994 to 2009, and a founding member of the ASGTBA.

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to the last Sikkim king's endeavour to construct a Sikkimese national identity in the 1960s, which involved emphasizing 'Mongoloid stock'—that is to say, 'culturally Buddhist and not Indo-Aryan'—and distinguishing groups like the Gurungs from the 'ethnically Nepali' (Hiltz 2003: 73–4).

However, it was not until the 1990s that the number of Hindus decreased significantly in Sikkim. The percentage of Hindus decreased by 3 points in the 40 years between 1951 and 1991 (71 per cent in 1951 to 68 per cent in 1991),[11] but it declined by 7 points in the following decade, with 60.93 per cent of Hindus in Sikkim in 2001[12] and 59.98 per cent in 2006 (DESME 2006: 18–19). Although the greater part of this decline in the number of Hindus was due to the increase in Christian, rather than Buddhist, numbers, nevertheless, in 2006, 67.15% of Gurungs were enumerated as Buddhists (DESME 2006: 362). The only comparative data—since religion by 'castes' was no longer enumerated in the subsequent censuses—are figures from 1931: out of the total number of Gurungs in Bengal and Sikkim (no separate figures are available), a mere 0.39 per cent were Buddhist, and 4.57 per cent are listed as following 'tribal religion'. Since Gurungs were catalogued among Hindu castes in the census, it can be assumed that the remaining 95 per cent were enumerated as Hindus (Census 1931: 467).

The King's attempt to find a common denominator for a majority of Sikkim's inhabitants emerged from a context of political struggle between the then ruling elite, and political representatives of the 'Nepalese' majority. The need to safeguard the 'unity of the Nepalese' was mentioned in this context, and, for this reason, the Limbus withdrew their application for ST status in the immediate aftermath of the integration of Sikkim into India; consequently, only the Bhutias and Lepchas were ranked as ST in 1978. The possibility of claiming cultural specificities and specific rights, including the possibility of becoming Buddhist for ethnic groups that were part of the 'Sikkimese Nepalese', emerged only after the category 'Nepalese' lost its ability to organize political action, and consequently was no longer perceived as a significant category of common belonging.

[11] Census (1951: 446) and DESME (2006: 19).

[12] Census (2001: 513).

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Since the early 1950s, in Sikkim, 'Nepalese' has constituted a state category benefiting from seats reserved in the Legislative Assembly. At that time, the 'Nepalese' shared an equal number of seats with the Bhutias-Lepchas ('BL') in the legislative council, in an organization of the council labelled the 'parity system'.[13] After Sikkim became a state of India in 1975, the category of 'Nepalese' as well as that of BL was maintained in the Legislative Assembly; seats were also reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the 'Sangha', that is to say, for a representative of the local Buddhist religious community. But in 1979, the 'Nepalese' seats were abolished, while the Bhutia-Lepcha ones were maintained (though their number was reduced). Political representatives of the 'Nepalese' resented this reorganization of the legislative assembly. They considered that it endangered Sikkim's identity and culture, in particular since 'plainsmen' (that is, people originally from other parts of India) could now contest elections (Gurung 2011: 231–2). The category of 'Nepalese' no longer provided its members with political representation, and no longer gave them local Sikkimese identification to balance the stigmatization they received as foreigners in Sikkim, as in other parts of India. The recommendations of the Mandal Commission, made shortly afterwards, provided the 'tribal' or 'Mongoloid' among the 'Nepalese' with an alternative means to access protection and advantages from the state, as well as political representation. But it entailed shifting the site of political mobilization from the larger Nepalese category to the narrower entity of the ethnic group.

Chief Minister Bhandari was opposed to the implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission in Sikkim precisely because it would divide the Nepalese.[14] Indeed, detractors of

[13] On this subject, see among others Hutt (2008: 131–2); Sinha (1981, 2006: 7). The 'parity system' was contested because 'Nepalese' had the same number of reserved seats in the Legislative Assembly as the Bhutias-Lepchas even though they formed a larger proportion of the population.

[14] Sinha (2006: 15); *Sikkim Herald* (1990); *Sikkim Observer* (1990). The Chief Minister's reason given here is a 'short cut', through widely accepted in Sikkim (for example in, http://buddhilkhamdhak.blogspot.co.at/p/struggle-of-sikkimese-limboos-for.html). Bhandari more precisely described the

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the ranking of some of the Nepalese as OBCs labelled this process 'fragmentation', and expressed the view that it was endangering the political survival of the Nepalese. The category of OBC was then redefined in racial terms by Bhandari's opponents by being equated with the colonial category Mongoloid,[15] and opposed to 'NBC', that is, Newar-Bahun-Chhetri. This division was at the core of the political campaign for the 1994 governmental elections. A member of the Rai community, P.K. Chamling, was eventually elected Chief Minister in 1994. His government finalized the implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission.[16] By the end of 1994, the Limbu, Tamang, Bhujel, Gurung, Rai, Mangar, and Sunuwar (including Mukhia) were declared as OBC by the Sikkim state; Thami, Jogi, and Dewan obtained the same status in 2000.[17] All these groups, except Dewan and in addition to Sanyasi, were gradually included in the central list of OBCs from 1995 onwards.[18]

The ASGTBA was registered a few months before Chamling's election by one of his close supporters. Its declared aims were to promote social welfare in the Gurung community, and "to study and research the history of origin, growth, tradition, culture, religion and language of Gurung community and collect them for future record".[19] The

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recommendations of the Mandal Commision as "discriminatory", since it did not propose that the Bahun, Chhetri, and Newars also be listed as OBC (*Sikkim Express* 1990).

[15] For the colonial construction of this division and its theorization in 1990s Nepal, see Hangen (2010: 53–6). For the meaning and political role of the category Mongoloid in Sikkim, see Hiltz (2003: 73–4).

[16] The process had been started at the beginning of the year by the interim government that replaced Bhandari's government for a short period.

[17] Sikkim Government Gazette No. 94, 11 April 2001.

[18] See *ncbc.nic.in/Pdf/sikkim*. Limbu and Tamang were recognized as STs in 2003, hence deleted from the list of OBCs (Limbus are however still mentioned on the list). As for the Dewan, "no community with this nomenclature is known to exist in Indian census operation" (Sinha 2006: 18). A possible explanation for this is that the Dewan was not listed as a tribe in the 1931 census (Department of Information and Public Relations 2008: 272).

[19] Memorandum of the All Sikkim Gurung (Tamu) Buddhist Association.

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association's members also have the objective of obtaining Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for the Sikkimese Gurungs. As Galanter (1991 [1984]: xvii, 122) explains, SCs and STs receive a larger quantum of preference than OBCs, as compensation for the disadvantages related to their social position at the bottom of the caste hierarchy (for the SC) and at the geographical margins of the Indian social order (for the STs).[20] In 1978 in Sikkim only Bhutias and Lepchas were included in the category of ST. Gurung informants who work as government employees consider the high-ranking positions of certain Bhutias and Lepchas in the administration to be a result of their special protection by the state.[21]

As early as May 1993 the men who would go on to found the ASGTBA in 1994 addressed the Sikkimese Gurung demand for ST status to the state government. In 1995 the Sikkim state government submitted to the central government its demand for the inclusion of Limbus, Tamangs, and Gurungs on the central list. The Limbus and Tamangs obtained ST status in 2003, but not the Gurungs. The Gurungs were declared Most Backward Classes (MBCs) in 2003, but only at the Sikkim state level.[22]

One of the first leaders of the ASGTBA explained clearly that the shift to Buddhism would enable the Gurungs to obtain ST status. More than being mere tools for material benefits, however, both Buddhism and ST status are multi-faceted resources, and the reasons for claiming them are complex. The reasons explaining the choice of Buddhism by Sikkimese Gurungs have many similarities with those expressed

[20] See further Shneiderman (2015) on the reasons why groups ranked as OBC in Darjeeling and Sikkim sought ST status.

[21] A good knowledge of the administrative machinery and of statistics provides them with the means to analyse the ethnic distribution of senior official positions.

[22] In 2003, Sikkim state declared Limbus, Tamangs, Bhujels, Gurungs, Rais, Mangars, Sunuwars, Thamis, Jogis, and Dewans as MBCs. It also declared the Newars, Bahuns, Chhetris, and Sanyasis as OBCs (Sikkim Government Gazette n°341, 23 September 2003). These 2003 declarations were not enacted at the central level, which also does not have a distinct list for MBCs; all these ethnic groups therefore have different status and rights under central and Sikkim regulations (see Subba 2013: 140–1).

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by Nepal Gurungs.[23] More generally, in the 1980s and early 1990s Bhandari's political opponents were inspired by the Nepal Janajati movement, Sikkimese Gurungs used the same sources of ideas as Nepal Gurungs and 'Mongols' generally speaking; in particular, Gopal Gurung's book *Hidden Facts in Nepalese Politics* (1985) was widely distributed across Sikkim during the 1994 political campaign.[24] It led people to consider that they were "outside the caste system", as one of my informants put it.

As in Nepal, the shift to Buddhism was explained as a return to the original Gurung religion and linked to the Tibetan origins of the group:

> From the eighteenth century the Gurungs were associated with the ruling group almost as much as the Magars, but, unlike the Magars, they have always had a strong link to Buddhism. One of their leading clans is named 'Lama', and they practise a form of Tibetan Buddhism (considered 'low' and 'unorthodox' by Tibetan teachers, but nonetheless accepted as related). (Gellner and Hausner 2013: 86; original parenthesis)

The idea that Gurungs abandoned Buddhism due to Hindu domination in Nepal (Hangen 2010: 141–2) is currently expressed in Sikkim as well; in particular, it nourished the political struggle against Bhandari, whose opposition to the ranking of Nepalese 'tribals' as OBC was explained by the fact he was a Chhetri. Amongst Sikkim Gurungs, as in Nepal for the Magars and Tharus, Buddhism was a means for constructing a common ethnic identity, when people sharing the same ethnonym are scattered widely, having varying origins and different histories of migration (Letizia 2014: 294–5).

[23] Hangen analyses in detail the reasons why Gurungs in eastern Nepal, as well as supporters of the Mongol National Organization 'shift' to Buddhism She shows that it is connected to the rejection of Hinduism and contains multiple meanings, such as asserting a more authentic Gurung identity, returning to the religion of the ancestors, challenging the Bahun's authority, and enacting belonging to the Gurung community at both village and transnational levels (2010: 138–44).

[24] On Gopal Gurung's life, political activities, and writings, see Hangen (2010: 60f). For his influence in Sikkim, see also Gurung (2011: 243).

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After 1994, becoming Buddhist for the Sikkimese Gurungs became part of the government's programme of "tribalization" (Sinha 2006), which entailed state support for single ethnic group-based identities as part of a government's project to support all claims for ST status.[25] The adoption of Buddhism within the context of a struggle to get a better position within the system of positive discrimination is a feature of India's politics more than it is in Nepal. Even more specific to India is the adoption of Buddhism as part of a claim to be ranked in the category of Scheduled Tribe defined by the state in terms of backwardness,[26] while in Nepal, for many ethnic associations, becoming Buddhist was part of a project of democratization (Hangen 2010: 132–3, 150), modernization, the promotion of education, and *abandoning* "backwardness" (Krauskopff 2003, cited by Letizia 2014: 296). In Sikkim, Buddhism is also the dominant groups'—that is to say, the Bhutias' and Lepchas'—former state religion, whereas, as Hangen (2010) shows, shifting to Buddhism for Gurungs in Nepal is a way to oppose and challenge Hindu domination of the state.

No official text mentions that STs should be Buddhist. Under a constitutional order of 1950, as amended in 1990, STs can be from any religion.[27] However, the Darjeeling Gurungs' "initial application for ST status was denied on the grounds of too much Hindu assimilation" (Middleton 2016: 183). Additionally, Buddhism has a particular place in Sikkimese history and politics, which also helps to explain

[25] Shneiderman shows that the extension of reservation to OBCs had the effect "of countering class and nation as primary identities by situating ethnicity as both an essential marker of social difference and a politically salient category through which to make claims on the state" (2015: 151). Regarding this Sikkim state policy, see also Subba (2013).

[26] The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs declares the following "essential characteristics for a community to be identified as Scheduled Tribes": "Indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, shyness of contact with the community at large, geographical isolation, and backwardness" (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Annual Report 2010–11: 21; see tribal.nic.in). On this subject, see also Arora (2007), Middleton (2016); and Middleton and Shneiderman (2008).

[27] A religious criterion is required only for SCs, who can only be Hindus, Sikhs, or Buddhists, according to the same order.

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its salience for the Gurungs. It was the Sikkim Kingdom's official religion until 1975; Nyingmapa (Tb. *rnying ma pa*) Buddhism is the most represented in Sikkim—as well as being the school chosen by Gurungs—and the Karma-Kagyu (Tb. *ka ma bka' rgyud*) school is also well established. Buddhist lamas were traditionally among the members of the State Council, and the state administration looked after monasteries (Rose 1978: 206–7). After Sikkim became a state of India, the 'Ecclesiastical Department' was retained (Sinha 1975: 157–8). Though its role was gradually extended to include the administration of religious institutions from all denominations, it is perceived as remaining focused on Buddhist monasteries (as highlighted by its label 'Gompa Department'[28] in everyday language).

As early as 1992—before the registration of the association and under Bhandari's government—future founders of the ASGTBA went to the Pokhara region of Nepal to learn about Gurung culture. "In Nepal, Gurung culture has been preserved," explained one of the founders of the Sikkim Gurung Association. Since then, ASGTBA's members have been to the Pokhara region numerous times, and most particularly to Manang district (which is the most Buddhist, though not regarded as the most paradigmatically Gurung, area). After the 1992 tour to Nepal, a Gurung Nyingmapa religious specialist settled in Sikkim in 1993. He was offered a house to settle with his family in Burtuk, a village in the northern suburb of Gangtok. In the following years, the Burtuk Gurung Tamu Gonpa Ugen Pema Choi-Ling Gompa was built with financial help from the government. The gompa was registered in 2000 under the Sikkim Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs as a monastic school, and the teacher receives a salary from the government, like most of the monastic schoolteachers in Sikkim. Since 2010 an annual subsidy has additionally been granted to the gompa by the Ecclesiastical Department. The establishment of Buddhist teaching by the first master from Pokhara was

[28] 'Gompa' (Tb. *dgon pa*), literally 'isolated place', is the common name given to religious institutions for non-celibate Buddhist religious specialists, as well as for celibate ones (both are usually translated as 'monastery'). In this context I translate it as 'temple'.

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welcomed with enthusiasm by the Gurung community. Eight more Gurung Buddhist masters from the same Nepalese region were soon after invited to settle in Sikkim by the association. Those masters were sent to several Gurung rural settlements in Sikkim.

THE 'POLYTROPY'[29] OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN GURUNG VILLAGE COMMUNITIES

In order to analyse the conditions of cultural and identity changes among the Gurung community of Sikkim, I now present the religious changes in the Gurung hamlets of Yangang from the 1980s until the present day. The upper part of the hamlet of Pathing[30] in Yangang contains a small group of ritual specialists of a religious practice that locals call *u-may* (Tb. *dbu med*). This term originally refers to the cursive letters of the Tibetan script, and my informants opposed it to *u-chen* (Tb. *dbu chen*, that is, the printed Tibetan script), which refers to Nyingmapa Buddhism.

[29] See Gellner (2005), who uses this concept in the sense given by Carrithers (2000) of eclecticism and fluidity of religious life. Gellner and Hausner (2013: 77) understand the notion of polytropy as referring to "an attitude that simply ignores the differences between religious traditions or teachings," which is different from ecumenicism that "acknowledges different and separate traditions and seeks a unity behind or between them". On the eclecticism of the Gurung field of belief in particular, see McHugh (2002); see below for more details.

[30] The hamlet of Pathing is multi-ethnic: 11 groups are represented. The Gurungs are 63 per cent of the total population (of 746 persons) according to the DESME census data of 2010 (unpublished). Buddhists are 72 per cent, Hindus 22 per cent, and Christians 6 per cent. The percentage of Gurungs is higher in the upper part of Pathing where my study took place. The DESME census does not separately enumerate the upper and lower parts of Pathing, but according to my informants, this upper part includes 54 Gurung houses, and a few Chhetri (2 houses), Sherpa (1), and Rai (1) houses. Among the Gurungs, 28 houses belong to Ponjyo, 8 to Ghonde, 7 to Lamchane, 7 to Tongi Lamchane, 5 to Koli Lamchane, 3 to Korongi Lama (a lineage of the Lama clan), 6 to Telahija, and 2 to Legoy. In the village, no one could speak Gurung, including the oldest inhabitants.

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The oldest Gurung *u-may* ritual specialist of Yangang that villagers recall was called Dhokanay Lama. He was invited to Yangang by a prominent Gurung family of Pathing hamlet of the Ghonde clan (known as Ghotane in Nepal, one of the four clans, Np. *char jat*, that formerly claimed higher social status within the Gurungs). Dhokanay Lama came from a place that Yangang villagers refer to as Matsya (probably Matsya Pokhari) in Sankhuwasabha district, Nepal. However, since he was the only son in his father's home, he had to return there and could not stay in Yangang. He asked his brother-in-law (his wife's younger brother), called Jas Bahadur or Migi Lama, to settle in Yangang in his place.

Migi Lama is Jas Bahadur's clan name. This clan name also exists among the Gurungs of Ankhu Khola valley (Toffin 1976: esp. 40–1, 46 fn. 15) as well as in the Modi valley, on the southern slope of the Annapurna region of Nepal, as studied by Pignède (1966). Pignède reports that *mi-gi* is a clan name for eastern Gurungs, and a local lineage name for western Gurungs (1966: 170, 189–90).

The narrative of the invitation of Dhokanay Lama to Yangang recalled by today's Ponjyo priests suggests the establishment of a long-term donor–chaplain relationship initiated by the Ghonde family. Though this may be an *a posteriori* reconstruction to cast the relationship in a Buddhist idiom, it nevertheless reveals certain social facts. Firstly, it suggests that there were no ritual specialists from the Gurung Lama clan in the locality. Secondly, it suggests that there were pre-existing links between Yangang Gurungs and Matsya Gurungs; this is supported by the fact that Migi Lama already had a wife in Darjeeling where he used to go to perform rituals.

Migi Lama's son recalls that his father arrived in Yangang in 1990 B.S. (1933–4 CE) at the age of around 30. He got married in Yangang about ten years later and his eldest son from his Yangang wife—the man I interviewed—was born in 1943. Until his death in 1987, Migi Lama trained four disciples to his religious practice. These four men were from Yangang. Three of them belonged to the Ponjyo clan—the best-remembered today was called Ghokul Singh—and one to the Ghonde clan. Ghokul Singh's ancestors were originally from Chyangthapu in Panchthar district (northeast Nepal). After Migi Lama's death, Ghokul Singh took over the transmission of the lineage to four disciples: his own son, Migi Lama's son, the Ghonde Lama's

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son, and the son of one of the other Ponjyos. Interestingly, the village *ghebring* shaman also participated in the training, while continuing his own practice (in Mohoriya, as described by Pignède, *pucu* and *klihbri* also share a common training).

Pignède (1993 [1966]), Macfarlane and Gurung (1990), and Mumford (1989) call the two types of Gurung ritual specialists *pucu* and *klihbri*, *poju* and *klebri*, and *paju* and *ghyabre*, respectively.[31] In Nepal, in the Annapurna region, as well as in Gyasumdo, both are shamans, and they have varying areas of expertise; the *pucu/poju* is an exorcist, healer, and death specialist, and the *klihbri* a death specialist (Pettigrew 1995). In each pair the latter is also a clan name, whereas the *pucu* shamans come from the Kromze or Lehnai clans.

The distinction into two status groups, referred to in the older literature on Gurungs in Nepal, is recognized by older Yangang Gurungs, although they use the term *barha* (twelve) *jat* rather than *sorah jat*. They consider it, as most Gurungs in Nepal do, as a Hindu imposition that should be annulled, and in fact, while knowing about the endogamy rules, they mostly do not follow them. In Yangang, Ponjyo is a clan name. Yangang Gurungs refer to *u-may* priests as 'Ponjyo lamas'. They claim to have equal status to the *char jat* clans (without being one of them). They actually make a distinction between the Ponjyo and Ponjyu clans; the latter would be the clan of the *ghebring* shaman and belongs to the *sorah jat*.

The fact that Ponjyos can marry with Gurungs of either group may indicate that they rose in status thanks to the function of priest gained by its members in Yangang. The narrative of origins of the *u-may* priests or 'Ponjyo lamas' explains both their Tibetan origin and their high social status: in a certain Nepali village, the death rate suddenly increased, and *paju*, *ghyabring*, as well as Gurung lamas, were not enough to perform all the death ceremonies. Consequently, people went to Tibet (to a place called Ponhighi in Kham) to find more priests. They met with the Tibetan king, and requested to 'borrow' some priests, promising they would return them once Gurung

[31] See also Evans et al. (2009); Gurung (Chapter 15 below); Macfarlane (1976, 1989); Messerschmidt (1976); Pettigrew (1995); and Strickland (1983).

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disciples had been trained. They took the religious masters to their home, but never let them go back. According to my informants, Ponjyo derives from the Nepali word *paijho*, which means 'to borrow' (from Np. *painu*, to be obtained). These new lamas were given equal status to the old ones.

In Yangang, among the four living *u-may* ritual specialists, one, residing in upper Pathing, takes charge of most of the remaining ritual activity. He is known as Jagat Lama (or Lama Maila), and was my main informant. He described the rituals he was still practising, and those he was not practising any more, or under simplified forms, for reasons that I will discuss in the next section. Yangang *u-may* lamas' centrality in the local Gurung community lies in their expertise in the cult of family gods (Np. *kul deutā*). They also perform the main life-cycle rituals, such as naming rituals for newborns (Np. *nwāran*), weddings, and funerals (Np. *arghaun*) (on funerals, see Gurung, Chapter 15 below). They also perform rituals for the consecration of new houses (Np. *bastu puja*), rituals to ward off bad luck, and others to cure sickness. In particular, they perform rituals to heal broken bones, and cure sicknesses caused by ghosts. They perform rituals of purification (Np. *cokhyaunu*) for families whose son or daughter has married a member of a low-status Hindu caste. Discrimination against low-status castes is questioned in the context of buddhization—*u-may* ritual specialists openly defend the abandonment of discrimination based on the Hindu hierarchy—but villagers still request this ritual, and marriages with low-status castes are not well accepted; the children of such unions are not allowed to enter their maternal grandparents' house.

Alongside Hindu rituals, they recite *u-may* texts, as well as texts common to Nyingmapa ritual specialists, such as Domang (Tb. *mdo mangs*), and Barchelamse (Tb. *Bar ched lam gse*, whose title literally means 'to remove the obstacles from the path'; it is practised by Nyingmapa lamas to cure sickness in Sikkim). During the offerings to the local Devithan, 'shrine goddess',[32] located in the forest, which I observed in March 2012, the upper Pathing *u-may* priest recited Buddhist texts, while his father's brother's son made the offerings

[32] As translated by Mumford (1989: 82).

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to the deities of the Hindu pantheon.[33] My main informant also performs in his own home a ritual twice a day that includes the recitation of a text that he calls Kemtrol (Tb. *Kun grol?*) or Dasathar.

U-may lamas no longer practise mortuary rituals in the way that they used to in the past. Jagat Lama's description highlights the integration of the Hindu opposition of pure and impure, the Hindu notion of pollution, and its association with Buddhist and shamanic practices:

> If a father is dead, his son cannot take food from anybody but his wife (or other women living in the house) for 14 days. Family members have to call the [*u-may*] lamas immediately after someone dies. The lamas light 108 butter lamps morning and evening. He has to read all the sacred books: *Ripu, Ritu, Kemtrol, Sarangi, Chemal, Guru Chemal, Poinsso, Chewan Thini* ... He reads morning and evening for 14 days.
>
> If a person dies today and the sons are far away, they keep the dead body until the sons arrive; otherwise, if all family members are present, the cremation is done on the day of the death. If a lama has died, his body is kept in a sitting posture in the coffin ... If the deceased is a common man, his body will be kept lying horizontally and covered only with white cloth. When the coffin is carried to the cremation ground, a bamboo stick is tied on its side, and flowers and a ceremonial scarf (Tb. *kha btags*) are tied to the bamboo. A lama walks in front of the coffin, holding the scarf.
>
> Yangang Gurungs are cremated at the place called Korongi Dara, on the top of the hill above the Gurung Gompa. In the cremation ground, we make a pile of wood with seven layers. During the cremation, we read the text called *Tasso* and others, whose names I've forgotten.
>
> On the way back from the cremation, the sons have to shave their heads in the jungle near the river. The lama is not required for the shaving of the head, but the maternal uncle (Np. *mama*) is essential. When they come back home, they have to stay in a room called *koruwa*, which Bahuns and

[33] There are three Devithan in Pathing, to which the surrounding houses make offerings. These forest shrines are located at the source of the stream that provides water to these houses. The three Devithan shelter the same deities, headed by the goddess Shinga Devi, who are worshipped in the month of Chait for protection against natural calamities. Animal sacrifices, which used to be performed in this context, have now been replaced by fruit and *khir* (Np., rice cooked in sweet milk) offerings; regarding the importance of sacrifice in debates on Gurung cultural and religious identity, see Gurung, Chapter 15 in this volume.

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Chhetris call *kriya basne*. We also call the sons *kirya putra* [chief mourners]. They have to remain silent, and are not allowed to speak to anyone for 14 days; this used to be 13 days.[34] During this time, the sons have to burn butter lamps every morning and evening and prostrate themselves several times.

After we [the lamas] finish ten days of reading, a small bamboo box called *polo* is built. We get bamboo from the jungle and have to dance while bringing it to the house. We wear a white costume for this occasion with red strips on the shoulders and around the waist. The dress is called *posak* (Np. uniform), and we also wear a crow-like headdress made of five painted paper images of Buddhas (Tb. *rigs lnga*).[35] The *polo* has to be built by maternal relatives (Np. *mauli*). It is then kept for 3 to 4 days in the domestic chapel beside the main shrine. Two people have to stay close to the *polo*: one maternal uncle, and one brother. I don't remember all the details because we don't do this any more these days. We do only a simplified version for our close relatives.

The dead person's name is written on a piece of paper, and kept with the *polo*. After the fourteenth day of the funeral rituals, we [the lamas] perform the ritual *khar baṇu*, i.e. bow and arrow. Two to four lamas perform it together, and all the family, and generally also the neighbours attend the ritual. We take the *polo* outside with the piece of paper on which the name is written and a sketch of a human body on another piece of paper. We also wear the white costume (*posak*). We dance while reading sacred books, and shoot arrows from a bow on to the pieces of paper. We have to see the soul of the dead person, and we have to invite his *kul deuta* inside our body, and then we tremble [i.e., enter into trance, Np. *kamnu*].[36] If the 'soul' (Np. *atma*) of the dead person has become a ghost (Np. *bhut*), we have to call him and hit him, then we have to burn him; if it has gone to god's place (Np. *deuta* or *bhagawan*), we have to burn him, but in a different way.

[34] *Kirya basne* is the name of the 13 days after a death for high Hindu castes (see Bennett 1983: 92). It may well be that the shift from 13 to 14 days was motivated by the need to differentiate Gurung death rituals from Hindu ones.

[35] Each leaf depicts one of the Five Buddhas (Ramble 1982: 336).

[36] In another interview, the *u-may* priest explained that the *kul deuta* that was entering his body during this ritual was the deity of his own clan. This recalls the soul-calling ritual of the Gyasumdo *paju*: in this the main ancestral spirit enters his body, and empowers him to take the shamanic journey (Mumford 1989: 170).

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> Humans do not die for no reason; when they die due to sickness, ghosts take them and we have to kill the ghosts. Then we burn the *polo* some distance from the house. We perform this ritual for two or three consecutive days in daytime; in the first case, it is called 'three nights' (Np. *tin rati*), and in the second 'two nights' (Np. *dui rati*).

Numerous elements of these death rituals are shared by high-caste Hindu rituals, including the thirteen days (that became fourteen) of intense ritual activities after death during which the family is 'polluted' (Np. *sutak*), the head shaving, the 'sitting in mourning' (Np. *kriya basne*) for the chief mourner, and the separation of the mourners and widow from others after the cremation (Bennett 1983: 98–107).

Shooting arrows with a bow is a recurring element of rituals of exorcism in the Himalayas. Among the Gurungs of the Annapurna region, during the ritual period of the end of the mourning (G. *pae*) performed by both lamas and *pucus*, lamas dance to call the dead soul into a wooden construction representing the soul of the deceased (G. *plah*). The dead person's son shoots two arrows in the direction of the sky to frighten bad spirits who may prevent the soul from coming.[37] In Gyasumdo, during the death ritual performed by both *paju* and *ghyabre*, "Arrows are aimed at the *pla* (soul) effigy by male kin to provide weapons against demonic enemies on the trail" (Mumford 1989: 188; see also Strickland 1983: 229–32).

Yangang *u-may* lamas' *polo* is most probably another pronunciation of *plah*. My informant mentions the trance during the *polo* ritual, but not guiding the soul to the land of the death, as is done by the Gyasumdo *ghyabre* (Mumford 1989) and the Mohoriya *pucu* (Pignède 1966: 351). He explained the aim of the ritual as "calling the soul of the dead people" and "sending the soul to the land of gods (Np. *bhagawan*), in order that it does not become an evil spirit and does not stay around." This recalls one of the *pucu*'s death rituals in Mohoriya (Pignède 1966: 352).

What stands out about Yangang *u-may* lamas' ritual practices, when compared to Gurung specialists in Nepal, is the combination

[37] Pignède (1966: 346–7, 353). McHugh (2002: 230–3) also presents a description and analysis of a Gurung *pae* in the Annapurna foothills.

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of Buddhism and shamanism, which are socially separated in other Gurung communities. All in all, they combine practices, dress, and instruments that are elsewhere performed by various rituals specialists such as the Buddhist lama, *pucu*, and *khlibri* for the Gurung death rituals in the Annapurna region and Gyasumdo (Pignède 1966). They have, in addition, "accommodated to Hindu cultural systems", just as Gurungs in Nepal do when they settle in urban and lowland areas (Messerschmidt 1976: 2).[38]

Yangang *u-may* lamas differentiate themselves from the *ghebring* on the basis that *ghebrings*' ritual texts are in different languages: "We came to know that the *ghebring* use the same ritual texts as us, but they read in Nepali; the content of the texts are almost the same, but most of their books are written in Nepali while ours are mainly written in Tibetan," explains one of Yangang's *u-may* lamas. We can also see here that the Yangang *ghebring* used to use ritual texts whereas the Nepal *pucu/paju* and *klihbri/ghyabre* do not use ritual books but oral chants and mythical stories (Mumford 1989; Pignède 1966). However, my main informant has an ambivalent relationship to written ritual texts: he presents them as a central element of his practice, but also explains the importance of knowing these texts by heart. In his daily ritual practice, I observed, the ritual text was wrapped in a cloth and placed in a wicker basket in front of the priest while he recited it by heart.

In this context of the 'polytropy' or 'eclecticism' of Gurung religious practices (Gellner 2005; McHugh 2002), the expression of religious belonging varies from person to person.[39] For one of the Yangang *u-may* lamas, the passage from Hindu to Buddhist ritual practices is a matter of translation: "Buddha is called Sangye Tsenjay, Shivaji is called Guru Rinpoche, and Vishnu is known as Papha Chenrezi; Kandroma are Devi, and we have to worship all these."

[38] On the coexistence of religious practices and ritual specialists from diverse traditions within Nepalese Gurung communities, see also Macfarlane (1976); Messerschmidt (1976); Macfarlane and Gurung (1990); Pettigrew (1995); Pignède (1993); and Tamblyn (2002).

[39] In line with Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin, belonging is understood here as involving attachment to a community, and "perceptions and performances of *commonality*" (2011: xii; original emphasis).

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In this informant's view, the names to be given to the gods depend on the donor's wish (and religion), which highlights the fact that he can perform rituals for both Hindu and Buddhist donors.

Another expression of belonging can be seen in the necessity some villagers felt of concealing from me their practice of rituals such as the cult of the *kul deuta* (family gods) and of the *pitri* (ancestors). For example, when a former specialist of the cult to the *pitri* recited for me incantations to his ecumenical shrine, his son, who arrived at that moment, scolded him and explained that what I had seen was not practised anymore since Gurungs were now Buddhist. Later during my fieldwork, several villagers described their still on-going cult to the *kul deuta* and the *pitri*, and during Buddhist rituals they explained apologetically, "we are still learning to be Buddhists". The latter idea was also expressed by the ASGTBA's members. The main *u-may* lama, by contrast, rather than seeing rituals, such as worship at the

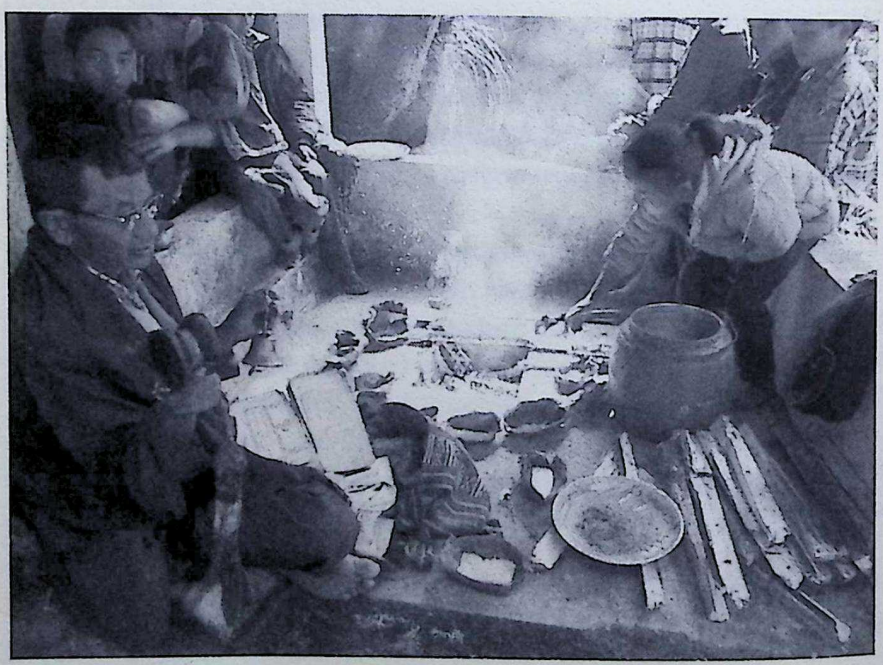

Figure 3.1 Jagat Lama presides over a fire sacrifice at the Devithan, Yangang.

Source: Mélanie Vandenhelsken (27 March 2012).

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Devithan mentioned above, which are also performed by Hindus, as 'not really Buddhist', sees them precisely as Buddhist rituals that also happen to be performed by Hindus.

Two perceptions of religious belonging can be identified here: on the one hand, the idea of a "continuity" (Holmberg 1989: 86), between "fields of belief" (following McHugh's formulation, 2002: 216) that are separated elsewhere, enables the concept of an equivalence of Buddhist and Hindu gods. On the other hand, the distinction between practices to be displayed to outsiders, and others to be concealed or abandoned, as well as the buddhization of Hindu rituals, highlight the concept of an incompatibility between Hindu, Buddhist, and shamanic ritual practices. In my view, Sikkimese Gurungs have recently moved from the first to the second expression of belonging. This specificity can be linked to the context of a first phase of buddhization, started by the *u-may* lamas in Yangang that I will discuss in the next section; in a second phase, boundaries are erected between Hindu, Buddhist, and shamanic practices as part of ethnic activism, as I will show in the final part.

FROM ECLECTICISM TO ETHNIC ACTIVISTS' 'PURIFICATION' OF BUDDHISM: BECOMING 'GENUINE SIKKIMESE'

Migi Lama's son's narratives describe how *u-may* practices have undergone several changes in relation to various political contexts:

> Our lamas have worn [the] red [dress] since time immemorial. One day, in a Gurung house [in Nepal], after my father had performed the death rituals, people had a discussion and asked him, 'Long ago we used to partly understand the sacred texts you read, but we do not understand them any more. Why?' My father replied, 'That is because they are in Tibetan'. He was also wearing red at that time. The Gurungs had a high social position, and the *ghebring* used sacred texts in Nepali. People then told my father, 'Now, Lama, you must leave or Gurungs will kill you because we normally use sacred text in Nepali scripts'. My father escaped, and he thought that people would call us Bhutia if he continued to wear red. He then gave up his red dress to a Bhutia lama, and started to wear white [laughs]. But now only I wear red. Until we demonstrated in Kathmandu, we were not allowed to wear red in Nepal. Gurungs did not understand

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Figure 3.2 Jagat Lama in the white priestly robes that he used to wear in the past.

Source: Mélanie Vandenhelsken (27 March 2012).

> that we were wearing the costume transmitted to us by our Guru. In the past, due to lack of knowledge, we could not take the food that had been touched by Bhutias; it was 'communal' [in the sense of 'casteist'] before. Bahuns would not take food touched by Chhetris, Chhetris would not take food from Gurungs. That is the reason why Gurungs were not allowed to wear this red dress. Earlier people could not fight so they wore white out of fear.

This narrative highlights the distinction between *ponjyo* and *ghebring* as well as the claim that Buddhism is the ancestral religion of the Gurungs. It also sheds light on the different perceptions of the assimilation between Gurungs and Bhutias in Nepal and in Sikkim. The narrative firstly recalls that Gurungs in Nepal had initially refused to follow Buddhism because of its association with Tibetans/Bhotes, 'Bhote' having negative connotations of otherness and dirtiness (Hangen 2010: 143). Second, it gives grounds for the assimilation of

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Gurungs with Bhutias in Sikkim. This idea is also expressed by ethnic activists in Sikkim, who challenge the Bhutias' special protection by the state, as we shall see below. This suggests that the narrative above is produced by the struggle between Yangang *u-may* lamas and ethnic activists, which I will also discuss further below.

Additionally, this narrative suggests that Migi Lama could 'reveal' his Buddhist identity only in Sikkim at the time it was being claimed in Nepal. Wearing the red dress thus appears as the outcome of mobility between Sikkim and Nepal, and of a dialogical relation established between the political situations in both countries by the Gurungs: it was worn in Sikkim because it was not possible to wear it in Nepal.

An alternative history drawing on the same pattern but which does not mention a prior 'buddhization' of *u-may* practice in Nepal is provided by another informant, a senior member of Yangang Gurung community:

> The old lamas used to wear a white costume, just like a *jhankri* [shaman]. For the ritual *tin rati*, they used to chant outside wearing casual clothes and, on the last day, they would wear a white costume, the headdress with the images, and a wig of long hair made of sheep's wool. It was like a show, all the villagers gathered to watch. Now, the lamas wear red costumes for the performance. This tradition of wearing red was established by the Tamu lamas. Before they arrived people didn't wear red.

This also suggests that the buddhization of *u-may* practice was related to the political movement of the Gurungs that involved shifting to Buddhism, which took place simultaneously in both Sikkim and Nepal.[40] Sikkim enabled the realization of the claim to be Buddhist that had been raised in Nepal: we can venture the hypothesis that Nepal provided the knowledge that it was possible to give a more Buddhist orientation to old Gurung ritual practices, and the Sikkimese state's support for the foundation of new Buddhist institutions enabled the realization of the project of buddhization.

Gokhul Singh and Migi Lama's sons highlight the key role of their religious masters in the promotion of Buddhism in the village in the

[40] However, the promotion of Buddhism amongst Gurungs started as early as the mid-1950s (Hangen 2010: 141).

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1980s: Gokhul Singh and his brothers, organized the building of the Yangang Gurung Buddhist temple (*gompa*) with government funds.[41] This gompa, christened Yangang Chang Chu Nyingmapa Tamu Gonpa, was built in 1980 and registered in 1983 by the Sikkimese Ecclesiastical Department. Gokhul Singh's son and nephew started their religious training when the gompa was completed. Gokhul Singh's son was 28, and Gokhul Singh's nephew 30, when they were trained. They received teachings from Migi Lama for about two years, and when the latter got ill and then passed away in 1987, Gokhul Singh succeeded him.

We could here venture the hypothesis that Yangang *u-may* lamas were former *pucu* or *ghebring* in Nepal, which, in their case, meant a ritual practice giving a large role to a form of shamanism and to Hindu practices and categories. Sikkim offered them the possibility of developing Buddhism as well, without abandoning the other aspects. It seems plausible to assume that the project of buddhization of old Gurung ritual practices simultaneously bore the promise of a better social status in Sikkim while also offering the possibility of taking part in the Janajati movement in Nepal. The fact that most Sikkimese lamas are householders surely enabled a bridging of old Gurung ritual practice and local Buddhism.

From the early 1990s, the project of shifting to Buddhism for the Sikkimese Gurungs was taken over by ethnic activists in the frame of the struggle for the extension of 'reservations' to OBC, and against Bhandari; the ethnic group then became a site of political action, substituting for the category of 'Nepalese'. This entailed the introduction of a new form of Buddhism, which the Yangang villagers call *u-chen*, and which is a contemporary form of Nyingmapa Buddhism. In the beginning, Yangang villagers, including Gokhul Singh's close

[41] It is common in Sikkim that ritual specialists of a gompa are recruited from a single ethnic group. In eastern Nepal also Gurungs practise Buddhism separately from other communities (Hangen 2010: 142). In Sikkim, ethnic activists also say that they call Gurung lamas from Nepal because it is important to have lamas from the community to perform death rituals, especially for the rituals of the first day following the death. Lamas from other communities can however perform other rituals such as marriages.

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relatives, were involved in the association, and in the new religious shift. But soon, the introduction of *u-chen* entailed replacing the *u-may* lamas. Gokhul Singh died in 1999, but from the early 1990s, *u-may* lamas left the village gompa. One informant explained what happened as follows: "The *u-chen* practice [that is, Nyingmapa Buddhism] was introduced in the village, and people started to say that our books were wrong, that the script was not correct. No one asked us to leave the gompa, but we left because we were very disappointed."

In 2008, Pasang Lama, a Gurung Nyingmapa lama who had trained in one of the Buddhist universities of Gangtok and had carried out the highly respected three years, three months, and three days' meditation retreat (known as Tb. *lo gsum zla gsum* in Sikkim), became the head of the gompa and the teacher for around ten young students in the village monastic school. In an interview in 2012 he expounded a view of the *u-may* ritual practice that is shared by other defenders of Nyingmapa Buddhism among Gurungs:

> In the past, Gurung religion was mixed with Hinduism. Because of the Hindu government, Gurungs followed Hindu practice. Now the Hindu part of Gurung religion is gradually being removed to transform the religion into pure Buddhism. There is still some way to go before it becomes pure Buddhism. At the moment, about 60 per cent has been cleared and 40 per cent remain Hindu. The things written in the old lamas' books are not understandable. Due to the fact that it was handwritten, it has many grammatical mistakes. They use the same books as us, but theirs contain mistakes that came from copying these older texts. We are now correcting these mistakes. Our [Nyingmapa] books have been properly maintained from the beginning, but the Ponjyos' books were written long ago and qualified masters were not consulted when they were copied.
>
> Our way of practising is also different. The dead person's soul has to be sent like an arrow to heaven. But the old lamas misunderstood how to do this correctly. They shoot the arrows at a box and dance. They do this because they did not understand the meaning of the sacred texts and their gurus did not teach them properly.
>
> Today, they still shave their head and do not eat salt and oil when they are in mourning. We are planning to remove this practice. I think that, in ten years' time, our religion will have become pure Buddhism. Before I arrived in the village, people were not using astrology (Tb. *brtsis*). If a person died, they would cremate him the next day. I introduced astrology

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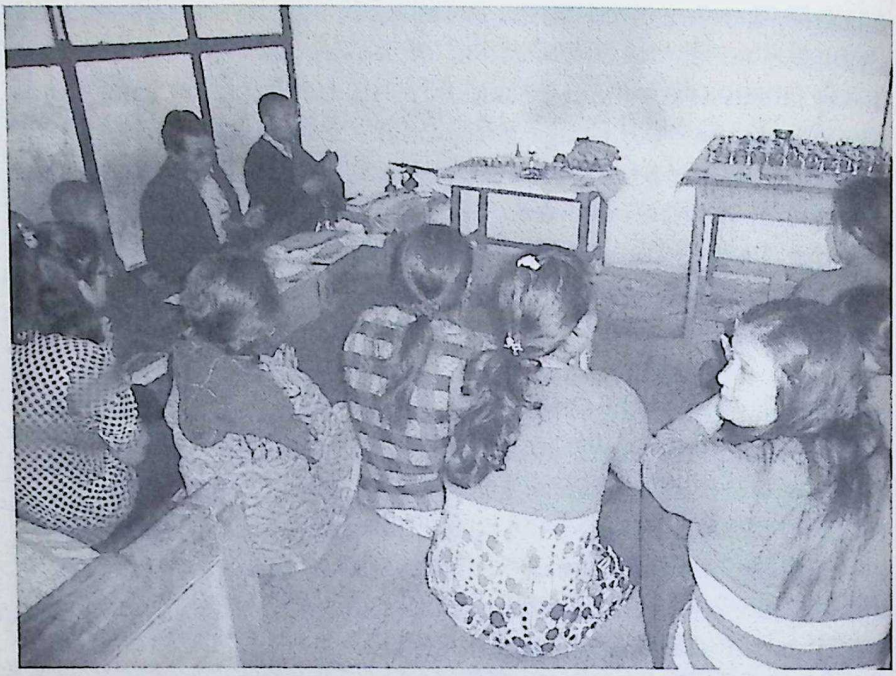

Figure 3.3 Jagat Lama and Pasang Lama perform a yearly death ritual together in Yangang.

Source: Mélanie Vandenhelsken (22 March 2012).

> [to calculate the day of the cremation]. Before I arrived, they would lie a dead person's body down; I also changed this practice and now, they all keep the dead person's body in a sitting position. If we are Buddhists, we should follow Buddhism, and Hindus should follow Hinduism.

The first consequence of this introduction of a new form of Nyingma Buddhism for the Yangang *u-may* lamas was a decrease in the number of donors who supported them. Those among the *u-may* lamas who continued performing rituals have restricted their practice of life-cycle and domestic rituals (mainly death ceremonies, and ancestor worship) for their own relatives. Yangang *u-may* lamas also explain that as a result of their ritual practice being stigmatized as 'impure' or 'mixed' they do not have any disciples. However, two of them have sons who have become Nyingmapa lamas. Additionally, ethnic activists maintained a link with Gokhul Singh through recognition of one

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of his nieces as *kandroma* (Tb. *mkha' 'gro ma*), a female yogi practitioner. 'Rinpoche', as she is commonly and respectfully addressed, now resides in Yangang Gurung Gompa. Furthermore, in the foundation narrative of the Yangang Gurung Gompa related to me by ethnic activists, the *u-may* lamas are presented as the Gompa's successive head lamas, as in the genealogies of the abbots of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries (Tb. *gdan rabs*).

A similar separation of Buddhist Lamas and *pachyu* occurred in Pokhara region, as well as in the UK (see Gurung, Chapter 15 below). This situation also echoes the struggle between Thangmi shamans and ethnic activists in Nepal and Darjeeling, and the appropriation of the former's practice by the latter (Shneiderman 2015). Sikkimese ethnic activists consider that *u-may* texts do not fit with the criteria that must be fulfilled in order to get ST status. The *u-may* lamas' history is used to legitimate the new form of Buddhism introduced in the village while the legitimacy of their texts is challenged on the ground of the texts' 'impurity'.

This argument in terms of purity is also used by Gurung ethnic activists in Nepal to justify hegemony over Gurung shamans (Macfarlane 2008; Mumford 1989). Here it is encountered in Sikkim as part of a new form of Buddhism that was being introduced at the same time, which lays stress more on the spiritual and soteriological orientations of ritual practices. Until that time, the most common Buddhist practices in Sikkim, as regards all ethnic groups, were more pragmatically oriented. The reduction of the old Sikkimese gompas' sources of income in the 1990s, their consecutive growing dependence on the state, and the simultaneous increase in influence of an international form of Buddhism—all this played an instrumental role in the introduction of this more 'orthodox' Buddhism in village gompas.[42] This re-orientation of

[42] This analysis of the recent changes in Sikkimese Buddhism is the outcome of my research on this topic, in particular in the frame of a two-year research project (2006–08) funded by the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. The distinction between the two forms of Buddhist orientations I mention here (see Samuel 1993) does not entail a clear-cut divide between them; it refers more particularly to the re-introduction of monastic vows in Sikkimese

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Buddhist practice in Sikkim became a resource for ethnic activists to enact the perceived necessity of disassociating themselves from Hindu-inflected ritual practices in order to get OBC and later ST status (Shneiderman 2015). This led to the perception that ensuring a better future for the Gurung ethnic group in Sikkim required the drawing of boundaries between religious categories (Gellner 2005) that had previously been connected and fluid in *u-may* lama religious practice.

In short, while *u-may* lamas' buddhization was very likely carried out in the frame of the Janajati movement by men who were living both in Nepal and in Sikkim,[43] the introduction of '*u-chen*' Buddhism was part of the ethnic activism conducted in the frame of the claim for ST status. The shift to Nyingmapa Buddhism is also a means for ethnic activists to construct an indigenous identity for Gurungs in Sikkim. As in Nepal, becoming Buddhist is a way to enact what is perceived as a more authentic form of Gurung identity (Hangen 2010: 241–2); in the Sikkimese context, this project is also carried out more broadly by borrowing the Bhutias' symbolic resources in order to simultaneously claim a similar form of 'indigeneity' and a share of the dominant position of Bhutias in Sikkimese society.[44] For example, the foundation narrative of Yangang Gurung Gompa displayed for me by local ethnic activists links the site to highly respected Bhutia religious

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Buddhist universities and in a few gompas, to the introduction of vegetarianism in many gompas, the concept of the necessity of introducing 'morality' into lamas' lives, and the development of new 'samsaric' rituals. These 'new' ideas and practices question and sometimes challenge the common and older householder lamas' way of life and ritual practices.

[43] Questions regarding the mobility between Sikkim and Nepal and migration are very sensitive for 'Nepalese' in Sikkim. People connect their duration of residence in Sikkim to their right to identity documents; this idea is no more directly grounded in the procedures to obtain residence rights in Sikkim, but it is kept alive by the centrality of the divide between insiders and outsiders in political discourses and debates. It is consequently difficult to collect information regarding people's migration and mobility histories.

[44] Bhutia indigeneity in Sikkim is contested because of their Tibetan origins; however, the group was recognized as Scheduled Tribe in 1978, and indigeneity is a central criterion for recognition as ST in India (Xaxa 2008).

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figures of the past, and presents the land donor as having been a Gurung Lama, whereas he was in fact a high-status Bhutia, a manager of the area working for the local landlord. An extract from a letter written by the ASGTBA to the government, in its attempt to claim ST status, stresses the Gurungs' 'links' (deliberately not clearly defined) to Bhutias and to indigeneity in Sikkim, "The Gurungs are one of the indigenous inhabitants of Sikkim, though there are no authentic historical records as to when the history of Gurungs in Sikkim begins. History of Sikkim which begins with the Namgyal Dynasty in 1642 A.D. has the record of Gurungs as the inhabitants of Sikkim."[45]

This refers to the never-published *History of Sikkim*, written by the Sikkimese king Thutob Namgyal and his wife Yeshe Dolma (1908), which in one section describes the foundation of the Sikkimese kingdom in 1642, and, discussing nineteenth-century events, mentions the migration of Gurungs. The ASGTBA's letter uses the coexistence of the Namgyal dynasty and the Gurungs in the same text to certify the indigeneity of the latter. A "competing belonging" with the oldest STs of Sikkim—Bhutias and Lepchas—is here combined with the "oppositional belonging that characterizes the relation to Hinduism" (Letizia 2014: 296).

In both Pokhara, Nepal, and in the diaspora, in the UK, there exists a highly contested differentiation among the Gurungs into two clan groups, and this difference has an impact on who tends to follow Gurung Buddhism and who follows Gurung shamanism (as discussed by Gurung in Chapter 15 below). By contrast, in Yangang the status difference between Gurung clans no longer has much significance and has been replaced by a differentiation based on economic status and seniority of residence in Sikkim. Most of ASGTBA's members indeed belong to the oldest families who settled in Sikkim in the nineteenth century, and who participated in the political history of Sikkim; on the other side, most Yangang Gurungs are more recent migrants.

45 See Man Bahadur Gurung, Kamal Gurung, and Megraj Gurung 'Gurung-Tamu: The Tribal Ethnography' (unpublished ethnographic report submitted as part of the application for state recognition as ST; no date). The letter, dated 31 March 1994, addressed to the Minister of State, Internal Security, and Home, Government of India, is included as Annexure 3 of the report, p. 41.

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Gurung ethnic activists in Sikkim now collect information on Gurung cultural practices on the internet. Websites such as www.tamupyelhu.org provide photos and films of rituals that can then be reproduced in Sikkim. Since the release of the Burman Commission's report in 2008 (Department of Information and Public Relations 2008), which proposes the criterion of 'harmony with nature' to identify tribes, ethnic activists have developed a great interest in 'shamanic rituals', such as offerings to Devithan, that they have reintroduced on the model of rituals watched via the internet. For ethnic activists today, then, Nepal is merely a source of information, whereas thirty years earlier, for *u-may* lamas, it was a site of political action.

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The leaders of the ASGTBA did not introduce Nyingmapa Buddhism to the village Gurung community: it was already there under another guise. Instead they introduced the compartmentalization of religious practices based on an official view that differentiates and separates religious practices into (among others) Hinduism, Buddhism, and shamanism; this contrasted with the capacity to cross the boundaries between religious traditions and teachings (or 'polytropy') that was previously prevalent in the village.

The struggle between ethnic activists and *u-may* lamas concerned the Hindu part of the lamas' practice, and also the positions of authority within the religious hierarchy redefined in the frame of the religious shift. The old religious lineage lost its ability to perpetuate itself under the same form. However, by means of getting their children trained as Nyingmapa lamas, which comes in addition to their legitimacy as traditional priests, the *u-may* lamas maintain religious authority in their lineage. Thus, conflicts between ethnic activists and old priests shape the religious landscape.

Furthermore, since the 1990s Sikkim's Gurungs are trying to become more Buddhist, in order to differentiate themselves from high-caste Nepalis and to get closer to the advantaged ST status of Bhutias and Lepchas. Unlike in Nepal, where "becoming not-Hindu" was part of a project of democratization for the Gurungs in eastern Nepal, set in motion at the end of the Panchayat era (Hangen 2010:

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132–3), in Sikkim Gurungs aim for cultural conformity to state categories. More recently, in order to gain this privileged indigenous status, they have also attempted to prove that they are 'primitive', which means that they have to describe and report the very practices that they are in the process of giving up in pursuit of becoming 'more Buddhist'. Ethnic activists' use of the internet, rather than of information provided by traditional specialists, suggests that they intend to free themselves from their dependence on the old priests and to recompose non-Hindu 'primitive rituals'.

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4

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE GORKHALIS OF MYANMAR

Sushma Joshi

SOME SAY THAT THERE ARE around 100,000 Gorkhalis (Nepalis) in Myanmar. Others give much higher figures. A Punjabi man I met estimated there were 700,000 Hindus in Burma, with 500,000 Gorkhalis, which would mean the majority of Hindus were from Gorkhali communities. The most recent Myanmar census is not considered reliable. There are also almost 300 Hindu temples in the country, two Mahayani *gompas*, and several Kirat worship houses. The Hindu temples are sometimes shared by with Indian and Punjabi (Sikh) communities, while at other times they may only serve the local village or community. The recently built Vihar in Myitkyina, still in the process of construction at the time of my visit, was new, and built by recent Theravadin converts from the Gorkhali community.[1]

[1] On Nepalis in Myanmar, see Haaland (2008), Haaland and Gurung (2007), and Gurung (2016). On Buddhism and politics in Myanmar in the period leading up to independence, see Sarkisyanz (1965) and Turner (2014); on more recent uses of Buddhism, see Schober (2010). The research on which this chapter is based was conducted in 2010–11, supported by the Asian

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Between 2010 and 2011, I travelled twice to Myanmar to find out about the social, cultural, and political histories of the Nepali diaspora living there. Although I also wanted to learn about the Nepali diaspora in Thailand, my research there was much more limited because the people, mostly Burmese Gorkhalis who were working in Bangkok illegally, were afraid to talk. My interviews with Burmese Gorkhalis in Thailand therefore took place exclusively in Chiang Mai. In this chapter, I focus on the Gorkhalis of Myanmar. The Nepalis of Myanmar refer to themselves as Gorkhalis, and I shall follow their usage.[2]

In 2010 and 2011 Myanmar was still ruled by the military junta and the reforms of 2014–15 had yet to take place. Therefore my enquiries were open-ended; people could answer in whatever way they found comfortable. The sense of unease in Yangon was palpable, and it was clear people were not happy being taped or video-recorded inside the city. Outside the capital, however, it was a different story. People spoke openly about their feelings—from the discrimination faced at the hands of the Myanmar state which did not promote Gorkhalis to the same ranks as native Burmans, to the sense of ease and comfort they felt in the only place they knew as home.

Yet I found a palpable affection for Nepal, which Gorkhalis identified as the country of their forebears. Nepal was 'the fatherland', or the one that gave birth to them, the place of their origins. I also found a deep-rooted comfort and sense of home in Myanmar, which they identified as 'the motherland', or the land which 'fed them mother's milk', brought them up and nurtured them. The Fatherland–Motherland dichotomy was clear. Everyone I spoke to said they would never choose to go back to Nepal, and that Myanmar was the country in which they were born and in which they would die. This sense of security in Myanmar, which most Gorkhalis seemed to share, seemed unshaken even by the most oppressive of political situations. Gorkhalis were part of the ethnic tapestry of Myanmar, and, through a complex interweaving of historical, religious, and geographic

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[2] For the film of my trip, *Burma on my mind*, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feFQgyupoMM. See also Joshi (2011, 2015).

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reasons, had come to be one of the most accepted communities in a country which otherwise had xenophobic feelings towards the 'Kala' or dark-skinned foreigners.

Religion is a major binding factor for the Gorkhali community in Myanmar. On my first day in the country I attended the Nepali embassy, which was holding a gathering. The Nepali Ambassador had invited the women's group of Yangon to attend a small meeting at her residence to discuss women's empowerment. All the women belonged to the Akhil Myanmari Deshiya Gorkhali Hindu Dharmik Sangh (United Myanmar National Gorkhali Hindu Association, referred to as 'the Sangh' or 'Gorkhali Sangh' hereafter). The Sangh, which had 36 different affiliate groups across the country, was a well-organized network which included all Hindus and also Mahayana Buddhist Gorkhalis within its membership. This community network, centred in the Gorkhali *dharmashala* or community centre in Mandalay, was the central binding force of all Gorkhalis' lives in the country. A number of important functions, from combatting 'suffering' or poverty to education, culture, religion, and language preservation, to supporting women and youth were shaped and promoted through this institution.

NEPALI LANGUAGE CLASSES IN HINDU TEMPLES

In Mandalay, Thakur Guragain, a writer and scholar who has also authored a book, *Myanmar ko Janjeevan* (Everyday Life in Myanmar), about the history of Gorkhali life in Myanmar (Guragain 2008), gave me a brief history of Nepali language teaching in the country. Mr Guragain's grandfather arrived 90 years ago from Terhathum district, and Mr Guragain himself was born in Sailung, Chandrakotay, in Mogok. According to him, when the military junta took over, it nationalized the banks and factories. The only aspect of society left untouched was religion: each group was allowed to continue their religious practices and beliefs without interference. In 1966 Myanmar nationalized the schools. All private schools were closed down and became government schools.

Private schools had taught Nepali students until then. The curriculum was based on textbooks from Darjeeling written by writers like Parasmani Pradhan. Mr Guragain had also been schooled under this curriculum. The routes to foreign educational materials as well

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as exchange with foreign countries were closed during this time. Only materials which had been officially approved by the government could be brought into the country. Due to the lack of books, people could sing and perform theatre in Nepali, but they could not read or write the script. There were no textbooks to learn the language. The songs had to be written in Burmese. A meeting was then held in Sri Ramchandra Mandir in Mogok, and people discussed the way in which the language was slowly being erased from people's memories. Since religion was allowed and could be practised freely, people discussed ways in which the language could be learnt from within these religious institutions. They decided to form a religious education committee which would impart the language and culture in the guise of religious education. A Hindi press called *Brahmabhoomi* existed, but since permits had to be taken to print anything, the Gorkhalis printed their curriculum on lithos. The motivation for the education was to preserve the language and culture and to teach Nepali culture and heritage to their children. During the summer vacations about 15–16,000 students now learn the Nepali language each year in temple premises and through these classes set up through a religious network.

Interestingly, one beneficial consequence of the nationalization of private schools was that every ethnic group now had access to the same education. According to Mr Guragain, different ethnic groups, such as Rais and Limbus, excelled in education alongside their Brahmin counterparts, and there was no disparity in educational achievement, unlike the situation in Nepal. Of course, the problem is that the education offered under this system was itself quite poor, and the English language was not taught to an entire generation from 1966 to 1982. On the other hand, the generation that grew up without English became very invested and proficient in the Nepali language, which appears to be spoken and passed on with a purity, fluency, and colloquialism now rare in Nepal. The Nepali language also became a binding factor for Gorkhalis throughout the country.

SANSKRIT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

There are also three schools that teach Sanskrit in Myanmar. The schools owe their existence to one Dharmaraj Adhikari (also known as DR Sharma), who dedicated his life to building schools in Myanmar.

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Mr Adhikari came from Nepal in a *paltan jagir*, that is, as part of the military. He wondered why the Gorkhalis were so poor compared to the other foreigners in Burma. Rangoon was full of Indians during this time, and they were all doing very well. According to Mr Guragain, Mr Adhikari concluded: "We [Gorkhalis] are uneducated, this is the reason for our poverty."

Having identified the lack of education as the reason for the Gorkhalis' destitution, and refusing a captain's position in the military, from 1948 Mr Adhikari spent the next 18 years building schools for his community. With missionary zeal, he set out with only a bag and a change of clothing, and started to travel the country. In this simple manner, he crossed Myanmar, encouraging communities to build their own schools. Between 1948 and 1966, he built 60 schools for the Gorkhali communities (the one in Lashio was a middle school; the rest were primary schools). In 1964, however, Dharmaraj Adhikari saw his lifelong effort to educate his community come to a halt when all of the schools were nationalized. From that point on the children were taught only Burmese and English.

In the midst of this, Dharmaraj Adhikari travelled to a village in Chaume. He asked about the house owner. The wife said that on the seventh day after giving birth, her husband had gone looking for a priest to name his new-born child. It was now 21 days later, and the man still had not returned. Maybe he could not find a priest, the woman said. Dharmaraj Adhikari then realized that he'd spent his life making secular educational institutions, but he had not paid attention to this cultural part of his people's lives. Instead of going back to the *dharmashala*, where he used to stay, he went immediately to Lokhu, where there was a small hut in which people who had studied Sanskrit were to be found. He then told them the story. Mr Adhikari said: "Our *jat* needs priests for everything. When your children die, they will have to go to the Vihar or to Church. Will you send your children to study Sanskrit?" The people then agreed to educate their children in Sanskrit, and that's how the first Sanskrit school was born in the country.

The school started with a *musthi dan*, a handful of rice kept aside each day for a specific purpose, in this case for the Lokhu Sanskrit school, to teach children the Sanskrit scriptures. The *musthi dan* concept now includes financial contributions and continues to the present day. There are currently 50–60 students studying in three

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Sanskrit schools, all of them Bahuns and all boys. As a specifically Brahmanical form of knowledge, other castes do not come and study Sanskrit. "Nobody has yet sent their daughters. I encouraged my eldest daughter, but then I married her off myself," said Mr Guragain. "A few Burmese have studied there, and some Hindustanis teach there. There was also a Sanyasi named Lokbahadur Giri who became a teacher there."

Dr Bishnu Gyawali, who studied three years in Myanmar and then 18 years in Banaras in India, reached the level of an *acharya* (or PhD) and now teaches at the school. These Sanskrit scholars and priests now also travel to Thailand, where they continue the priestly functions necessary for the rites and rituals of the Hindu community. According to Mr Guragain, men still all wear white clothes (*kacchad*) during their priestly functions. Because young boys do not know how to wrap and tie the unstitched *dhoti* fabric, it is sewn and tied back in the manner of a Burmese garment.

A few aspects of life in Myanmar are different from Nepal. "The Dasain *tika*, for instance, used to be white during the time of my father," said Mr Guragain. "We did not have the red colour. The powder we have here doesn't look right and it falls all over our clothes. We are, however, now learning from Nepal to mix the red."

The sacrifice of animals is not done formally any more, although people may do so inside their own homes. Mr Adhikari explained this as being contrary to the primarily Buddhist *dharma* of the country. He said: "God is the mother and father of both humans and animals, so it's not right to eat one's brothers." Although I did not personally witness a sacrifice, it is possible that the practice continues in rural farming villages removed from town and city centres, where the old Nepali traditions like *deusi* and *bhailo* singing are very much alive.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MIGRATION: ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION

Military history was one reason for Gorkhalis' tight integration into contemporary Myanmar.[3] Gorkhalis arrived with the British and were

[3] On Nepali migration to Myanmar, see Sakya (Chapter 5 in this volume) and Gurung (2016).

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part of the force that ousted the last king of Myanmar, Thibaw Min, in the Third Anglo-Burmese War, in November 1885. Gorkhali soldiers, it was rumoured, mentored the generals who now rule Myanmar. The generals were beholden to the older Gorkhali soldiers, and therefore to their communities. Local communities also think of the Gorkhalis as special forces that were sent by and for Queen Victoria, thus cementing their historical importance in the minds of neighbouring communities, like the Indian one. Gorkhalis also played important roles in both the First and the Second World War, and large waves of them arrived during these two key moments in the Gurkha battalions. During the Second World War, they were instrumental in defeating the Japanese.

Gorkhalis no longer have the privileged position they once held in the colonial period. Although a few Gorkhali officers have risen to high ranks in the Myanmar military—Colonel Zeya Kyawhtin Tanka Dhoj, who became Director General of the Hotel and Tourism Department under Ne Win's government is an example—most Gorkhalis now do not find an easy route to recruitment into the army. Gurkha battalions, which held a revered position in the British Army, have long since been shut down.

Gorkhalis were also discriminated against by the British. The British had their own mess where they ate beef, and since Hindu soldiers were considered non-beef-eaters, they had separate messes. On the one hand, the segregation was explained along the lines of practicality and food restrictions. On the other, the racial segregation ensured that the Gorkhalis would always remain lower in the military hierarchy and could not achieve the same ranks as the British officers. Gorkhalis, however, seem not to have resented this glass ceiling within the British military. One soldier explained it to me in this manner: "The British were educated and we were not. So therefore it made sense we didn't get to the same ranks as them. But now in Myanmar, we are all educated to the same levels, but they still won't give us the same positions and rank and salary as the Burmans." This sense of being seen as less than equal, and of being discriminated against, was clearly a challenge for many Gorkhalis who had dedicated their lives to Myanmar state institutions. Many Gorkhalis still join the Army and identify with the military state: a middle-aged man in Mandalay told me he had "eaten a few bullets" sent by the *bagi* (tigers), an allusion

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to rebels such as the Kachin, Shan, Karen, and others. Despite this loyalty, the Gorkhalis feel they are being edged out of their traditional territory of the military. Recruitment in the military is now difficult, unlike the British days.

A second reason for the acceptance of Gorkhalis into Myanmar's mainstream culture is cultural. The Buddha was born in Nepal, and therefore coming from the land of the Buddha gave Gorkhalis special privileges. Even when the majority of the Gorkhalis clearly identify as Hindus, these privileges are still accorded to them, due to the perceived connection. Hindus always have an image of Buddha in their temples and treat the Buddha with respect, since he is considered one of Vishnu's incarnations. Posters and pictures of Buddha may also be put up since he is a historical and culture figure associated with Nepal. There are also certain days like Buddha Jayanti (Buddha's birthday which falls on the full moon in Baisakh/May) which Hindus celebrate by inviting Buddhist religious leaders to give talks or a special worship.

This syncretic balance has now come under strain as a breakaway faction of newly converted Theravada practitioners (led by leaders, some of whom are from Bahun-Chhetri backgrounds) who now challenge the Hindu network. Unlike the previous governments which left different groups alone to practise their own religions, there now appears to be pressure from these Gorkhali Theravadins to convert to what is essentially the state religion—bringing with it its own set of issues regarding authenticity, claims of ownership towards the historical figure of Buddha, as well as tensions regarding the purity of the Buddha's teachings and who his real followers are (this is discussed further below, pp. 93–6).

A third reason for the Gorkhalis' complex integration in Myanmar is the fact that they have assimilated closely with various ethnic groups, in many areas taking on the language, culture, and dress of different communities among whom they have found themselves. The Bahun-Chhetris have generally not intermarried with the Myanmar ethnic groups, but the other ethnic groups from Nepal did, thus blurring the boundaries between Gorkhalis and Burmese. Even the Bahun-Chhetris, however, dress in traditional Burmese outfits. The younger generation, schooled in government schools, all speak Burmese. This chameleon-like ability to settle happily amongst different ethnic

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groups made them welcome wherever they went, and consequently they appeared to be on good terms not just with the majority group of Burmans, but also various ethnic groups.

There are only 16 Nepali ethnic groups (*jati*) in Myanmar, unlike the 60 plus in Nepal, according to Thakur Prasad Guragain. Among these, he identified Bahun-Chhetri, Gurung, Rai, Magar, Tamang, Sherpa, Jhaduwa from Assam, Damai, Kami, Kusunda, Sanyasi, Darai, and so on. In terms of formal citizenship, there would seem to be several categories of citizen, with some Gorkhalis holding full citizenship, while others were given citizenship with only partial rights. Some Gorkhalis believe that their Gorkhali leaders 'sold out' their people by agreeing to a nationality category which failed to include full rights. In the Dharmashala in Mandalay the Sangh members were actively trying to get information from Gorkhalis in rural areas who had not yet received their national citizenship papers, and collecting paperwork with the aim of helping them to do so.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE GORKHALI SANGH AND OF THE DHARMASHALA

Mandalay is the trading centre and the heart of the country. Gorkhalis from all over the country used to arrive in Mandalay, but they had no place to stay. The Punjabis owned most of the hotels. Both 'Arya Punjabi' (Hindu Punjabi) and 'Gurudwara Punjabi' (Sikhs) would only provide room to Gorkhalis if they did not need it for their own people, and there was space available. Gorkhalis frequently had to sleep on top of the vehicles in which they arrived. This put them in great difficulties when visiting Mandalay.

In 1978 the first *mahasabha* (general meeting) of the Sangh was held, under the leadership of Colonel Laxman Limbu. A decision was made to construct a *dharmashala*, or pilgrimage resting place, in Mandalay. A temple was constructed on top. Funds collected from Gorkhalis all over the country were used to build the dharmashala, creating a sense of joint ownership. The institution was also constructed with the aim of providing support to those who came to the city for health and medical care. The facilities include cooking facilities and bedding, which were provided cheaply for only 1,000 kyats, ensuring that everyone could stay there. "Our *dharmashala* is

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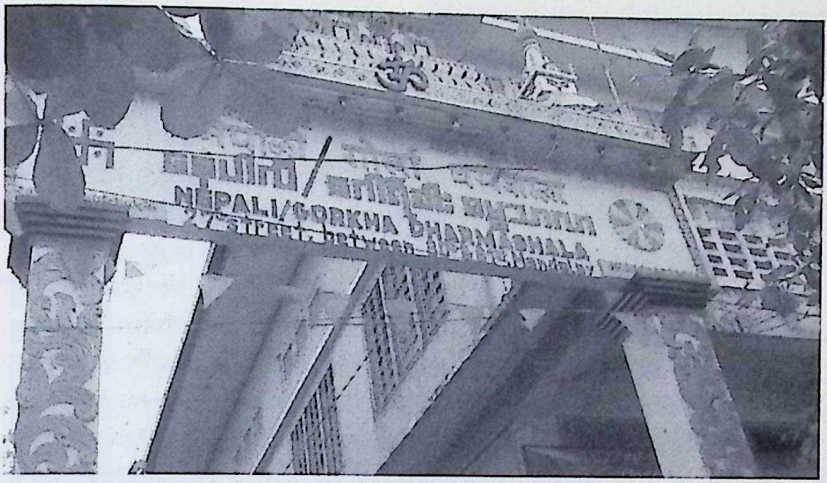

Figure 4.1 Entrance to Mandalay Gorkhali Dharmashala, Myanmar.

Source: S. Joshi (2011).

now the best, even better than any than the Punjabis have," said Om Karki, current Chair of the Sangh. I toured the large and spacious facilities, where people could be seen in big family groups bringing elderly grandmothers and children to the hospital. It was organized, and provided more services than any voluntarily run social or public institution that exists in Kathmandu at present.

It was clear that the contribution and initial sense of community service left by the founders has endured and has been preserved in the institution. The sense of service and discipline to this institution probably derived from three sources: the discipline of the Gurkha soldiers learnt in the British Army; the communal ethos of the first Limbu founders; and the notions of religious merit gained through selfless service that comes through Hindu dharma in the later stages.

Om Karki said that he had also been taken and jailed for 10 months during 1986, when the government nationalized the country. His property was seized, and also his car, and he lost everything. The situation improved later, and he now plays golf with the same people who jailed him. This sort of ability to adapt and forgive—and not hold grudges—seem to be central to Gorkhali ability to survive in a repressive and tense political environment. Om Karki's father came as an

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in-charge from Calcutta for a ruby mine in Mogok. The American who was the supervisor of the mine was killed by locals during the night. His father was responsible for locking up the mines, checking people's mouths to see they were not hiding gems, and for checking their beards for hidden gems. At dawn, when his father found out about the killing, he took the children, and left the house, garden, cattle, and all his property, and fled 18 miles into the jungle. Om Karki was four years old during this time. His father died in the jungle, and Om Karki himself grew up inside this community within the forest. His education suffered as a result, but his leadership skills may have gotten a boost with this difficult beginning. But now, he said, his children and grandchildren are doing well in the educational field.

The Sangh has 36 branches countrywide. There was general agreement that the Myitkyina branch was more active and more engaged than the rest. Amongst the Sangh's units (*sakha*) is one for eradicating poverty (*dukha-nivaran-sakha*). The unit appears to focus on many activities, including building temples, wells, and crematoriums. Families who cannot afford to pay for the cremation charges of family members receive support from the Sangh. The Sangh also organizes religious festivals like Teej, Durga *puja* during Dasain, Krishna Janmashtami *puja*, among others. In addition, the annual pilgrimage to Shivaratri in Sankhai is logistically supported by the Sangh to a great extent in collaboration with organizers of other communities. One of the main activities of the Sangh is the teaching of the Nepali language to students in the premise of temples during their summer vacations, as mentioned above.

Although the Sangh members assured me there was no caste discrimination in the schools, caste was usually referenced, and appeared to be very much in evidence. Whether caste discrimination against Dalits is more or less than in Nepal or India would require further research, but in Rampur an old Bahun man of 86 said the following:

> People say that Biswakarmas are *pani nachalne* (water-unacceptable). They also say this about Sujikar (tailors) and Sarki (shoemakers). Why is the Nepal government allowing this caste discrimination in this day and age? How is it that we can accept water from Muslims, who eat beef, and we can go to their hotels and drink their water, but we cannot accept water from people who are from our own culture and civilization, and who follow our religion and speak our language? The children of the shoemakers are now

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> doctors. We allow them to inject us with their syringes, but we don't accept water from them. Isn't this injustice? (Translation by the author)

In terms of economic empowerment everyone appeared on more or less equal terms. According to the Sangh members, Dalit families were doing very well economically, and perhaps, one source suggested, even better than the Bahun-Chhetris. Their children had also received higher education and were working as doctors, teachers, and so on. Most urban families in Myanmar seemed to have the same access to education, trading opportunities, and access to the cultural activities of the Sangh. In Myitkyina, on the other hand, it was clear that were still impoverished Gorkhali communities living in the jungle and tending cows and buffaloes as they had for generations.

PRACTISING MAHAYANA BUDDHISM IN MYANMAR

There are two gompas run by the Gorkhali community in Myanmar. One in Pwe Oo Lin (formerly Maymo), built in 1935 by Nathung Rinpoche, who came from Tibet. According to my sources, the second Rinpoche of this gompa was of Thakali descent and studied in Tibet. After seeing how the community was mixing with the Burmese, and realizing the religious tradition would soon be lost, Nathung Rinpoche commenced building the gompa. It currently has around five students studying to be monks, and three teachers. A *gupha* (cave) retreat is a prerequisite for monks to graduate.

Each full moon they also organize a puja which brings the 300 Lama (Tamang) households in Pwe Oo Lin to the gompa. In addition, they hold an annual Buddha Jayanti celebration in which everyone from the Gorkhali community, including Brahmins, Chhetris, Gurungs, Sherpas, and so on, all attend. The gompa is now considering holding Nepali and Hindi language classes.

Kanchi Lamini, a 67-year-old woman, from a village close to the gompa, said that there were two kinds of Buddhism in Myanmar: Lama Buddhism, and Burma (Bhante) Buddhism. The Lamas had Rinpoches, the Burmese had Bhantes. Her great-grandfather was a very important lama in one of the biggest monasteries in Darjeeling. Her grandmother came from there, and her grandfather from *muluk*, that is, Nepal. She said, with humorous sarcasm:

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> Now the Bhantes are telling us that those who follow the Burma Buddha will go up to heaven, while those who follow the Lama Buddha will go down there. But I haven't seen anybody return from heaven. I won't believe those who tell me about this. I will only believe someone who returns from heaven and tells me they saw it with their own eyes.

Kanchi was keen that a Rinpoche, and not a Bhante, should do her death rituals, as all of her family for generations had done before her.

Kanchi Lama mentioned that she had been to Sankhai once, and gave me detailed instructions on how to get to Sankhai, light the lamps, offer incense, and pray with great intensity and an open heart—all to gain blessings from Shiva, and to gain merit from this most meritorious Shivaratri pilgrimage. The syncretic nature of Gorkhali life in Myanmar was apparent from this example. Kanchi Lama had gone on a Hindu pilgrimage and had sought the blessings of Shiva. Yet her primary identity was Mahayana ('Lama') Buddhist, and she wanted her death rites done within the Mahayana tradition.

The second gompa is in Myitkyina, a short drive from the centre of the bazaar. When I visited, an election was taking place for different positions within the community. The majority of those present were Tamangs. The women sat on the left and the men on the right. Up on the dais, the leaders of the community called out the names of those who had been nominated and pre-selected to head various sections of the committee. The gompa was a Mahayanist institution, but a few monks in the mustard-yellow robes of the Theravada tradition were also present. The gompa was evidently not a space of monastic learning, but a space for community gathering. The people in the gompa were all laypeople, and I did not see any monks wearing the maroon robes of the Mahayana tradition. The two Theravada monks who attended the community elections appeared to be participating less in their roles as religious figures, and more as state representatives who were monitoring the elections.

KIRATI DHARMA IN MYANMAR

There are still followers of Yoma *dharma* in Myanmar, although they are few and far between. According to Dhan Bahadur Limbu, a medical doctor in Yangon, an attempt to revive this old form of religion was made by two Limbus—Bharati Limbu and Siddhi

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Limbu—but attracted few followers. There is a Kirat temple near Rampur, Myitkyina, constructed in 2003. Alongside animist objects, the temple also displays the Hindu trident (*trishul*), the red turban of saints, and the name of the saint (Atmananda). The owners of the Kirat shrine are members of the Kirat Chumlung, which calls itself the Akhil Deshiya Myanmari Kirat Sanskriti ra Sahitya Sangh. As the title states, the organization focuses on culture and literature, which includes religion, and was evidently set up as a counterpoint to the Hindu Gorkhali Sangh.

In another temple, on the way to Rampur, there is a Kirat shrine hosted inside the courtyard of a larger Hindu temple complex. I was told by the people gathered that this structure was a Kirati worship shrine. It was clearly identified as a shrine associated with a set of beliefs different from Hinduism. Yet at the same time was also a part of the Hindu temple complex, and there were no ideological disjunctions that made this sort of coexistence incompatible.

Dhan Bahadur Limbu told me that he attended the meetings of the Sangh and not the Chumlung, because "Their beliefs and mine don't match. I believe we are all Nepalis and if we separate like this, we will break up. Therefore I am in the Akhil Gorkhali Hindu Dharmik Sangh and not the Chumlung. I assist them, however. But I am not officially involved." He also said that he was entirely Hindu, and that many Rai-Limbu-Magar were in fact Hindu before they started to convert to Buddhism in recent times. He estimated that about 75 per cent of *matwali* people (as he called them; that is Rais, Limbus, and Magars) had become new Buddhist converts in recent years. These new converts also went to the Chumlung, instead of to the Gorkhali Sangh. At the same time, many of the nominal converts to Theravada continue to observe Diwali, Dasain, and other Hindu festivals and rituals.

CONFLICT BETWEEN NEW CONVERTS TO THERAVADA AND HINDU NEPALIS

As noted above, in some places within Myanmar the Nepali community is split between those who would want to follow Theravada Buddhism and those who call themselves Hindus. The most outspoken and passionate leaders of the new missionary movement for Theravada Buddhism were, contrary to what one might expect, Bahuns

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and Chhetris. Many of them had not spent a great deal of time studying Buddhism. Their preaching seemed to be based on a few months spent with Burmese monks in Yangon and learning from their radical polemics.[4] In Chiang Mai, the rift had become deep enough to polarize the community in half. Thailand is outside the purview of the Burmese military state, so the motivation for the deeply felt aversion towards the Sangh was less political, but more ideological. Money had been raised to build a small Hindu temple in Chiang Mai, and after the donations were raised, a number of people dissented and said the money should be used for a secular community meeting hall. The committee eventually agreed to go along with their original plan to build a temple. The dissenters walked out and wanted nothing to do with the temple any more. A Limbu man, also a Buddhist, told me tactfully that he still went to the temple to attend the functions because he realized the value of having a community meeting space, which was more important for doing social work and for serving the community than not having a community centre. What was clear is that the general tolerance towards each other's religious practices and spaces, as evidenced in Nepal and also between the Mahayanists and Hindus in Myanmar, had become sharply destabilized by this new movement to convert people to what was perceived as the only pure and morally right Buddhist tradition.

The newly converted Theravadins of Gorkhali descent wanted to align themselves with mainstream Burmese Buddhist culture, to become part of what Nepalis call the *khostay* tradition. The term *khostay*, meaning corn-husk people, comes from the fact that Burmese people used to buy corn husks from Gorkhali farmers to roll and smoke as oversized cigarettes. The term is slightly derogatory. The insult of *khostay* was used also to speak against the overall oppression of the military junta experienced by everyone in Myanmar, and should be read in this context.

In Rampur, a Gorkhali village on the outskirts of Myitkyina where people still kept cows and were dairy farmers, I was told that it was

4 On the history of growing intolerance within Burmese Buddhism, see Turner (2014); and on the conflation of 'Burman-ness' and being Buddhist, see Walton (2013).

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indeed true (as one Theravadin convert had complained) that the Theravadins had not been allowed in the villages to play *deusi* and *bhailo* (a tradition in which groups of women and men go singing in communities during the Hindu festival of Tihar and get money from the community). But this exclusion was because the new Buddhists wanted the Hindu followers to stop following their own traditions. "We are followers of the Sanatan Dharma. We have to hold 13 days of mourning after death, and we cannot cut our topknots or offer meat or fish to priests," I was told by a young man, who pointed out that those who were being excluded from the *deusi* and *bhailo* wanted people to implement these changes in their death rituals. This was the reason the new monks were not allowed inside the community.

A Sangh member in Myitkyina explained to me that there were no tensions between the Hindus and mainstream Burmese Theravada institutions and monks. The tensions were with the new Gorkhali converts, who insisted on asserting that their chosen beliefs were superior. In fact, said this Sangh member, there had always existed a harmonious relationship with the Burmese Theravadins. The Burmese gave the Sangh legitimacy—both through the government, which had given it permission to register as a network and to continue its work, and through Burmese Theravadin religious institutions. Gorkhalis went to Burmese temples and applied the golden paper meant for good luck onto the Buddhas, and they also respected the Theravadin monks. The Theravadin Buddhists, in return, acknowledged the concept of the holy syllable 'OM' as being of spiritual importance. There was a communal reciprocity in acknowledging one another's practices and rituals. The problems arose from new Gorkhali converts who insisted that "they were professors while Hindus were still in Class 10," according to my source. "For us Hindus, we need rites and rituals. That is our pathway to Ishwara." But the new Gorkhali converts insisted that these rites and rituals had to end, and were less advanced than what they themselves were practising.

I met several of the new converts in the Vihar in Myitkyina. Their education in Buddhism, as already mentioned, appeared to be fairly cursory and the content appeared more political and ideological than religious. Their identity as Buddhist lay in opposing Hindu practices, rather than in the finer points of Buddha's own teachings. In fact the struggle between the established Gorkhali Sangh members and the

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new converts appeared to be a struggle for leadership. Who were the true legitimate religious leaders of the community?

It also appeared to be part of an attempt to reform radically the way religion could exist in Myanmar. Different beliefs, it seems, were no longer possible—it was now clear that there was one right path, and everyone had to follow this path, unlike the previous decades in which different faith-based communities had been left alone to pursue their own beliefs and traditions. The new Gorkhali Theravadins were trying to impose and assert their own notion of right livelihood and right way of living onto a people with a set of deeply engrained cultural beliefs. The Gorkhali Hindus' perception of this as cultural domination and intrusion was complicated by the political situation in which individuals associated with Burmese Theravada institutions were now perceived to be part of the Burmese culture in general, and part of the government's complex mechanism of state control in particular.

A shift in policy, from the freedom and non-interference in matters of religion from the 1960s, to the more state-controlled and surveyed religious landscape of the present, was also evident in stories of temple construction processes that had been stalled or blocked by the state. Myanmar, it was clear, has shifted from being a country in which religion was sacrosanct and untouched by state intervention, to one where it had become more politically contested as a terrain for power, in the early part of the twenty-first century (Schober 2010). The state's crackdown on the monk protests, coupled with its ever-present tension with minority groups, meant that religion had suddenly become a space where the state had started to assert control in different ways, including state-sanctioned missionizing and conversion in order to produce a more homogeneous Theravada Buddhist nation. No doubt the tensions with the Rohingyas, which have erupted into active conflict in the last decade, are in part also triggered by this new shift in policy and direction by individuals and institutions within the Myanmar state.

THE SPIRITUAL COSMOPOLITANISM OF HINDUISM

On the one hand, it is clear that, despite being settled in Myanmar, historically the Gorkhalis there had evolved a primary common identity as 'Hindu'. Yet, even in Myanmar, there was no monolithic

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'Hindu' congregation. Hindu offshoots, like the Hare Krishnas and Brahmakumari followers, with their own nuances and ideological differences in practice and belief, exist in Myanmar as they do in the subcontinent. In Myitkyina, Gorkhali and Indian followers of Hare Krishna (ISKCON) have a large and thriving temple, where devotional singing and dancing take place in the evening. My Gorkhali guide, who was a Hare Krishna follower, told me he had no interest in religion till he was a young adult and was taken to the Hare Krishna temple, after which he slowly started to engage and become active in the community. It was clear that he did not identify as part of the Sangh or engage with their religious events. In part, this could be because his mother (a widow) had converted to Buddhism, which hinted at her alienation from the main group of Hindus, thereby separating them from the mainstream community. Whatever the reason, it was clear that he felt separate from the Sangh, hinting at the divisions within the Hindu community.

The Pashupati temple in Pwe Oo Lin (formerly Maymo) also brings together Hindus from Gorkhali communities during big festivals. It was constructed after King Mahendra's visit to Myanmar in the 1960s. Next to the temple is 'Gorkhali Street' of wooden and bamboo houses, where poor Nepalis live. The temple is a replica of Pashupatinath in Kathmandu, complete with a large Nandi (bull) facing the entrance, as well as the 64 *shiva-lingams* arranged in a miniature replica of the Pashupatinath temple's labyrinth. A stone inscription records the establishment and the inauguration of the temple in the presence of King Mahendra and Queen Ratna of Nepal. Religious scriptures are read for 11 days during Shivaratri.

The town of Pwe Oo Lin also has a Navadurga temple where there are nine consecutive days of worship for Dasain. According to temple sources, the Durga image was set up by soldiers during the British colonial era, and then relocated to its present location afterwards. Several temples in Pwe Oo Lin were set up by Indian businessmen, but were left with Nepali caretakers when Indians and Chinese were forced out in the 1970s.

The 108-year-old Shankai Shiva temple, near to Pwe Oo Lin, is another multicultural space that brings together several South Asian communities. Its festival at Shivaratri attracts people from all religious communities, including Muslims, Chinese, Burmese,

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and young Theravada monks. A giant water slide is erected for the festival and the water is referred to as 'Ganges water' (*gangajal*). Sadhus and priests giving sermons are also in evidence. According to the origin story of the temple, the British were building a railway track through the area when red blood sprouted out of the ground. The workers refused to move and demanded that a temple be built in the location to appease the spiritual force that had manifested. The railway track was diverted to a new location, and Sankhai had its Shiva temple.

Shivaratri at Sankhai requires the complex involvement of many people, including Sangh members who sleep in the location for three months, preparing food and sleeping arrangements for the thousands of pilgrims from all over Myanmar. According to an official, the volunteers came from all over Myanmar not just Lashio, the closest town. Volunteering in this way brings religious merit. "Those who volunteer here get more prosperous, and everything goes well in their family lives," I was told. Large amounts of money was also raised during this festival, and this money was used in the construction of the temple as well as in the *prasad*, or sanctified food, distributed for free to pilgrims during this event. Om Karki told me that a Shan official whom he had mentored like a son had turned up at the festival with 200 men, and publicly proclaimed his support for the event. The Shan presence shows how religious gatherings like Sankhai's Shivaratri festival are important occasions for the mobilization of ethnic affiliations and alliances.

LINKS TO NEPAL

Within Myanmar there are four Hindu holy pilgrimage places (*char dham*), just as in India. Just as there are multiple Ayodhyas (in south India, in Thailand), so Hindu pilgrimage sites can be replicated within Myanmar. This adaptability of Hindu thought, where mythical pilgrimage spots, holy rivers, and holy shrines can be replicated in different spaces with great flexibility, has also been a factor in its survival over centuries (Eck 1982).

At the same time, the imagined holy land extends, for Myanmar Nepalis, to Nepal itself. Older people recall going to Nepal to make a pilgrimage to the Pashupatinath temple. They would go by the

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talako bato or 'lower road', which meant by road rather than by air, which needs a passport. They would leave their Myanmar citizenship cards with people who lived by the border. Then they were smuggled out from the border into India, taking Indian ID cards to cross India before entering Nepal. On the way back, they would leave the Indian ID cards by the border, re-enter Myanmar, and take their Myanmar citizenship cards up again upon re-entry.

While religious icons like the Pashupati temple evoke great reverence, most Nepalis in Myanmar are gently critical of the politics and social worlds of contemporary Nepal. While visiting Nepal, many have been caught in strikes and bandhs and spent their visits sitting in concrete mansions in Kathmandu. One woman in Mandalay told me: "I would never go and live in Nepal. I was there when an old woman died in front of the house I was staying in. In Myanmar, everyone would gather for a funeral, even the Muslims. In Kathmandu, nobody knew she had died." Many Gorkhalis in Myanmar watch cable TV news broadcast from Nepal and draw the conclusion that Nepal is a land of violent protest. One concluded: "It appears the leaders in Nepal only think about themselves, and about holding on to power." Other people expressed similarly ambivalent views about the politics they saw unfolding in Nepal. Gorkhali leadership in Myanmar is geared towards great service towards the community. Cloaked in the outward form of religion, the activism of the community is directed towards economic empowerment, education, linguistic preservation, and the continuation of culture. All of this has led to greater ties within the different ethnic groups of Nepal living inside Myanmar. It is a small and tight-knit community, with the primary emphasis on social engagement and service. The politics being beamed from Nepal shows the social discord and lack of ethical engagement of leaders, which is in stark contrast, so they feel, to what exists in Myanmar.

THE THAILAND CONNECTION

Transnational links with Nepal are far less regular than links with Gorkhalis in Bangkok and other parts of Thailand. The younger generation of Gorkhalis in Myanmar cross the border into Thailand, both overland and by air, where they work as tailors, domestic help, and shop assistants. Gorkhalis also own dried goods shops, tailoring

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businesses, and restaurants in tourist areas such as Phuket, Chiang Mai, and other cities of Thailand. The boom time was the 1990s, but even afterwards the Gorkhalis continue to do well in small business. Because of their multi-lingual skills—they can often speak Nepali, Hindi, Burmese, Thai, Chinese, and a smattering of English—Gorkhalis are in high demand as salespeople by Thai business owners in tourist areas.

In addition to the recent migrants from Myanmar, there have been Gorkhalis in Thailand who have settled there since at least the end of the First World War (see Sakya, this volume). A group of them settled in an area called Pilok, and these are the first historically recorded Gorkhali settlers in Thailand. The term *Piloukay* refers to this first wave of Gorkhali immigrants in Thailand. These first generation migrants paved the way for the recent wave of Gorkhalis who came from Myanmar, and who often claimed to be Piloukays in order to gain legal residency.

ASTROLOGICAL BELIEFS

No work on religion in Myanmar can be complete without a mention of astrology. Astrology permeates every aspect of political, cultural, and social life in Myanmar. This belief has spiralled off into state excesses at times. At one point, the currency printed by the Myanmar government was issued in astrologically approved numbers, drawing ridicule from international observers and decimating the life savings of ordinary Burmese. The capital was also shifted from Rangoon to Naypyidaw on 6 November 2005, on the advice of astrologers.

Burmese astrology originates from the Indian *jyotish* astrological tradition. In the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon there is a pillar for each day of the week. As in South Asia, each day of the week is ruled by a specific astrological planet. Sunday is ruled by the Sun, Monday by the Moon, Tuesday by Mars, Wednesday by Mercury in the morning and Rahu in the afternoon, Thursday by Jupiter, Friday by Venus, and Saturday by Saturn. Every Hindu temple in Myanmar has representations of the Navagrahas, or the nine planets. According to the Indian priests at Mandalay's big Ganesh temple, some visitors (including a German man) return every year to have pujas done in the belief that their lives had substantively improved after these planetary

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pacification rites and rituals. Regular rituals for the Navagrahas have all but died out in temples in Nepal and India, but are still very common in Myanmar and Thailand. The astrological tradition acts as a cultural bridge between Gorkhalis and the Burmese just as Buddhism does, and helps the former to integrate, assimilate, and gain acceptance.

***

South Asia has long been known for religious harmony and pluralism. In present-day Nepal, Buddhist and Hindu practitioners get along amicably, sharing temples and deities. Bauddha (Bodhnath) has Sarasvati and Ganesh images and many Hindu temples have images of the Buddha or of his various manifestations. Indeed, there appears to be a move in Nepal to add a miniature *chaitya* with the four-sided Buddha in many Hindu temples that previously had only Hindu deities. For example, in the Krishna temple in Hadigaon, Kathmandu, a *chaitya* was added a decade ago, and the same has happened in Tangal's Karya Binayak temple.

In Myanmar the new conflict between the Theravada converts and the established Sangh appears to have its origins in a struggle for moral legitimacy as well as for political leadership. A set of new converts, it appears, are courting the state religion in order to compete against, and replace, the established, and increasingly organized and successful, umbrella network of Gorkhali Hindus. They also appear to be influenced by new radical and polemical forces which bring a less tolerant strain of belief about Theravada into the public sphere. Whether the monks in Yangon, who are tutoring the new Gorkhali converts, are state-sponsored individuals whose lectures are geared more towards controlling minority populations than in imparting religious education is a topic for further research. What is clear is that their teachings has already divided the community and created a sense of discord that did not exist in the past.

On a more philosophical level, the conflict appears, at least overtly, to stem from the Hindu notion of all being part of one all-inclusive spiritual landscape. Hindus insist—and are puzzled when the Gorkhali Theravadins cannot comprehend and appreciate the fact—that including Buddha in the pantheon of Vishnu's incarnations is an

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act of inclusion, not domination. Gorkhali Theravadins, on the other hand, actively reject this as an oppressive act of appropriation, since Buddha Bhagwan is viewed as a spiritual leader of this world, one who advocated for right action and right thinking amongst people rather than gods. Unlike the rites-and-rituals-oriented Hindus and their gods, Theravadins claim to be better people because they focus actively on improving their moral selves on a daily basis. The Hindus retort that action is just as important to them as to the Buddhists, and they point to the Bhagavad Gita as the proof that action is central to Hindu thought.

The crux of the conflict rests on the above disagreement, heightened by other complementary differences which start to take on giant proportions in the context of conflict. The offering of meat to monks, for instance, is seen as hypocrisy by the Hindus, who ask why Buddhists who believe in non-violence (*ahimsa*) are offering dead animals to their spiritual leaders, who can very well refuse to eat meat, as their own Brahmin priests do. Gorkhali Buddhists insist that monks must eat what their followers give them, and they cannot refuse the food offerings. Hindus will have none of this, saying that, if a monk is known to be vegetarian, followers would out of respect not offer them meat in the first place, and they point to well-known Burmese monks in Yangon who are vegetarian. And so the issue of meat-as-offering becomes another marker for conflict, highlighting the fault lines between the two communities.

How this conflict will be resolved remains to be seen. Unlike the relationships between Hindus and Mahayani Buddhists, which remain cordial and at times syncretic and reciprocal, the relationship with the new Theravadin converts has manifested into active conflict that has carried over even to communities outside Myanmar, for example in Chiang Mai. With religious ideology at stake, and with the new Theravadin converts still shaping (and being shaped) by their newly adopted religion, it is still too early to say how the two communities will resolve the conflict. What is also clear is that for many Gorkhali Hindus inside Myanmar, rejecting the new Theravada converts from their community has become synonymous with rejecting the newly asserted control of the state over the private and historically unhindered sphere of religion.

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5

CREATING NEPALI ETHNOSCAPES IN THAILAND

Anil Sakya

LITTLE KNOWN TO THE GENERAL Thai public, a large number of Nepalis have been residing in Thailand for a long time, some of them for at least 100 years. It was only in 1978 that the Thai government issued an Act for aliens working in Thailand and in this Act the sub-category of Nepali migrant makes its first official appearance.[1] Available evidence and interviews indicate that Nepalis migrated to Thailand, then known as Siam, during the reign of King Rama V (King Chulalongkorn the Great), 1868–1910. The descendants of the early migrants continue to maintain their ancestors' way of life and traditions even today. They continue to eat and prepare Nepali food and observe important rituals

[1] Before that, in 1972, the Department of Provincial Administration classified them under the heading 'Burmese minorities'. Many Nepalis think of 1976 as the date of recognition, because that became the cut-off date: those who arrived before this date could claim citizenship. In 1983 the ID card system, described further below, was introduced. In 2004 the Ministry of Interior introduced a classification of 15 Thai sub-groups, of which the Nepali migrants (*Nepal o-pha yoph*) are one.

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and festivals following the Nepali calendar, though only a few of the younger generation can speak Nepali fluently now.

The exact number of Nepalis in Thailand is not known. According to Thai government data, 865 'Persons of Nepali Origin' (PNO) received Thai citizenship from the Ministry of Interior in 2006. The figure for 2001 was 1,100–1,200.[2] However, Amornphol Champathong (Nepali name: Rituraj Pandey), 52, a descendant of Nepali migrants from Pilok, commented that "the recent number of 1,000 something is only the people who were left in the last survey. The majority already received Thai nationality a long time ago and they were never considered as migrants." It seems highly likely that there are at least 50,000 people of Nepali origin in Thailand, most coming originally from Pilok, a border mining town in the far west of Thailand. Before that many migrated from Myanmar. Many Nepalis in fact estimate that the total could be around 100,000. Amornphol said, "Within my own family I can count up to 152 persons so imagine thousands of families like mine who are widely scattered in Thailand. Therefore, the number of persons of Nepali origin in Thailand should be more than 100,000."

Similarly, Kumar Karki, 41, originally from Myanmar and currently the president of the Thai-Nepal Association, Bangkok chapter, reported, "There are around 50,000 persons of Nepali origin who have already received Thai nationality but there are another 50,000 persons of Nepali origin migrated from Myanmar living in Thailand without work permits."

The migration history of Nepal (see Chapter 1 in this volume) shows that Nepalis have migrated from their homeland to other countries since the 1800s. The migrants usually headed east, to Sikkim, Bhutan, and Assam, and some continued onwards to Myanmar and Thailand. The rise of the Shah dynasty in the latter part of the eighteenth century also encouraged the mass migration of people from Nepal (Pradhan 1991).

More than 500,000 people of Nepali origin are believed to reside in Myanmar (see Chapter 4 above). During World War II Britain sent a contingent of Nepali Gurkha soldiers to prevent the Japanese

[2] Royal Thai Government Cabinet resolution of 29 September 2000 and 28 September 2001.

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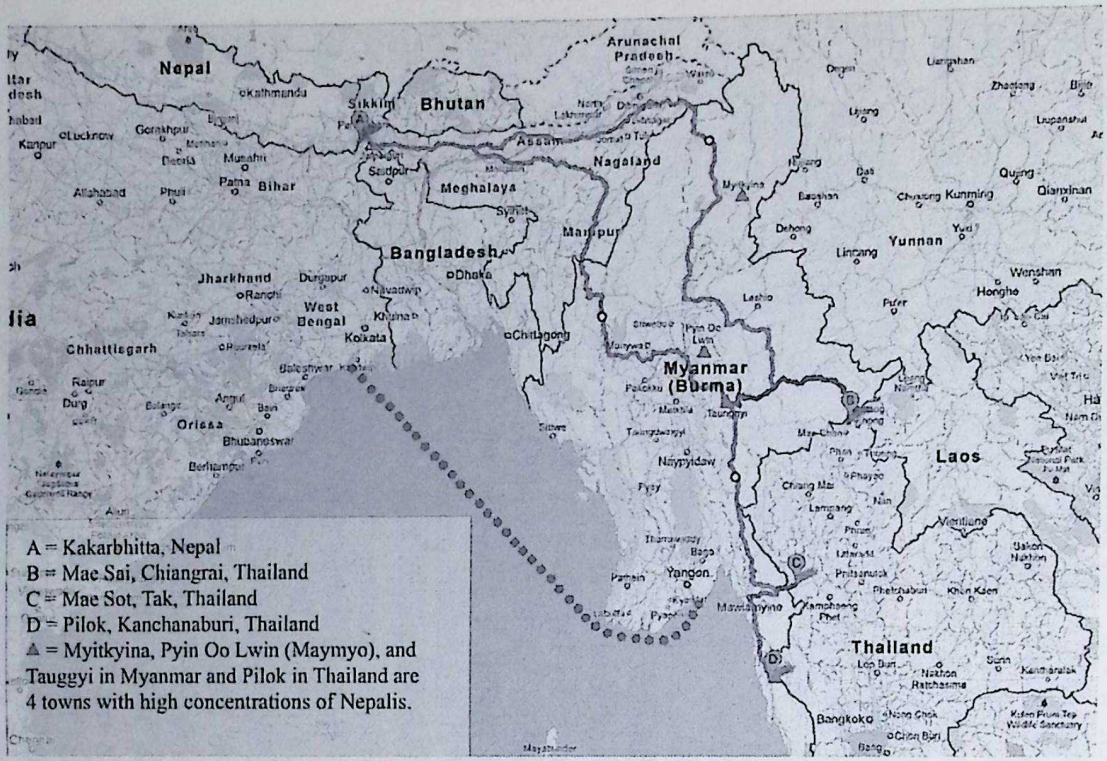
advance into Myanmar. These Gurkhas stayed on after the war and tens of thousands more joined them from Nepal. Originally, the Nepalis in Myanmar and Thailand lived without citizenship papers. The Burmese and Thai governments do not consider them Burmese or Thai even though they have lived there for over a century. The Nepali government, meanwhile, does not recognize them as Nepalis as they have no documents to prove their nationality. These Nepali migrants in Myanmar and Thailand return to Nepal on foot from time to time, taking the same mountainous route that their ancestors walked a century ago.

One way the Nepalis migrated into Southeast Asia was to travel by sea from Kolkata to Yangon. In the 1930s the boat fare was Rs 15 (Van Spengen 2000: 184). Santa Bahadur Lama, 75, a Nepali Thai recalled that when his grandfather, Kalu Man Yonjan, was serving in the British Army during World War I, the steamer fare from Kolkata to Yangon was 10 Indian annas.[3] For those travelling by land there were two different routes. Route One went from Nepal to Guwahati in Assam, and then on to Shillong and Imphal, entering Myanmar via Tamu on to Ka Lay, Shwebo, Mandalay, and finally Pyin Oo Lwin (headquarters of the Burma Division of Gurkhas). From there they travelled to Thaton or Dawei, entering Thailand at Mae Sot of Tak or Pilok of Kanchanaburi provinces. Route Two led from Nepal to Guwahati, then Margherita, after which it followed the Ledo Road via Ta Nai, Myitkyina (another city populated by Nepalis) in Myanmar, and then to Tachileik at Mae Sai of Chiang Rai province or Mae Sot of Tak province in Thailand. Map 5.1 shows these routes.

Some of the Nepalis who entered Thailand at Pilok border continued on to Bangkok and settled in the area known today as the Kokwua (cattle pen) intersection. Many others lived on the outskirts of Bangkok. Today a large number of people of Nepali origin can be found in the Thai provinces of Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi, Tak, Chiang Mai, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Surat Thani, Samui, Ranong, Phuket, Ko Chang, Pattaya, and Bangkok.

[3] Ten annas was equivalent to ten-sixteenths of a rupee. The difference between the two cited boat fares must be due to the fact that the crossing made by Santa Bahadur's grandfather took place much earlier and perhaps also because Van Spengen's source was a wealthy Manangi trader.



Map 5.1 Map of routes from Nepal to Thailand.

Source: Author field interviews.

Note: This map does not claim to represent authentic international boundaries. It is not to scale and is provided for illustrative purposes only.

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The first group of Nepali migrants who migrated in the nineteenth century was fully assimilated into the mainstream of Thai society. Only a few maintain their ancestors' link to Nepal and that too is limited to oral history. When they refer to other Nepalis they call them Khaek, which is a pejorative term for Indians.

THE 'COTTON ROAD': LEGENDARY LINKAGE BETWEEN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA[4]

There is no historical or archaeological evidence that allows us to date exactly when Nepalis began to migrate into Thailand. However, there are a few archaeological findings which indicate that in the ancient period a regular trade route already existed between Nepal and Thailand. Trade was undoubtedly an important channel for connecting various countries in South and Southeast Asia; culture and religions were another. The combination of these two forms of social intercourse offers a viable model for thinking through the arrival of all manner of cultural influences from South Asia to Southeast Asia.

The trans-Asian trade route commonly known as the Silk Road, which dates to the start of the Common Era, is widely acknowledged as the pathway by which Mahayana Buddhism reached East Asia (Neelis 2004). In addition to the Silk Road, the so-called Northern Highway, which connected the farthest north-eastern and north-western outreaches of the Indian subcontinent, provides another important precedent for thinking about the vital role of overland connections in fostering cultural exchange (Dar 2006).

Analogues play an important role in Southeast Asian historiography. Thus, Asoka's Buddhist mission to 'Suvarnabhumi', related in the *Mahavamsa*, was taken as a model for future missions. In a similar way, perhaps we should be seeking a Cotton Road as a southern analogue to the northern Silk Road. Running south below the Himalayas, this proposed southern overland trade route would have linked Chengdu in southern China with Assam, located at the boundary of South and Southeast Asia. It is called *Shuyandu Dao* (road between Sichuan and India). Archaeological evidence suggests that

4 The argument of this section was first presented in Sakya (2011–12).

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this southern route is some two hundred years older than the northern Silk Road (Leelalai 2001: 131). Given such a long-distance route, it is not difficult to imagine a southern offshoot of this Cotton Road, branching off and connecting present-day northern Thailand with the trade networks linking Assam and southern China.

One prominent example of widespread northern Indian cultural influence in Southeast Asia is the role of Ayurvedic medical theory in Thai traditional medicine (Mulholland 1979). What other forms of evidence might there be for the 'Cotton Road'? Instances of mass migration that occurred along the proposed trade route are one potential piece of evidence, as in the case of ethnic Tai peoples living in Assam, India. There is an etymological argument that not only are the Ahom people ethnically linked with the Tai ancestors of the present-day Thai people of the central Southeast Asian mainland, but that in fact the name of their present-day homeland, Assam, is a northern Indian derivation of 'Siam', the term used by Thais for their own kingdoms (Leelalai 2001: 110). This might suggest that the Ahom people migrated from the Chao Phraya River valley (or the areas immediately to the north prior to the historical Tai migrations southward)—perhaps across an overland trade route—to present-day Assam. If documented, such a large-scale migration of an ethnically Tai people would lend some credence to the idea of a developed overland trade route connecting the Southeast Asian mainland with northern India. However, other speculations on the history of the Ahom people suggest a common origin with Nepalese highland peoples (the Tibeto-Burman-speaking Kiranti tribes of eastern Nepal).[5] Either way, it would seem that Assam occupied something of a middle ground along the 'Cotton Road' joining the inhabitants of the northern Indian subcontinent and mainland Southeast Asian peoples in sustained commerce and potentially other forms of cultural exchange.

Setting out from the other side of this projected overland trade route, there is a good reason to suppose that this route was well travelled by highland Nepalese peoples. Contemporary ethnographic research can help to corroborate these easterly connections. To

5 On the Kiranti peoples, see Gaenszle (2000), Pradhan (1991), Whelpton (2005: 13–14).

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this day, highland Nepalis, inhabitants of James Scott's 'Zomia' (2009) or upland Southeast Asia, can travel on foot between their homelands in Nepal and northern Thailand in as little as 45 days.[6] The late Ratna Sivakriskul, a PNO from Bangkok, related how Nepali cowherds were employed to tend the royal cattle in the early Bangkok period prior to 1890s (below). In the Chiang Mai National Museum, there is a wooden footprint of the Buddha dating back several hundred years (c. 1400–1550 CE), which depicts the entire Buddhist cosmos. One of the heavenly realms is labelled with the ancient Nepalese Ranjana script and is adorned with a Nepalese-style stupa (Penth 2000). Similarly, excavations at Wat Ratchburana in the city of Ayutthaya, which was constructed in 1420, revealed two small Buddha images from Nepal (currently exhibited at the Chao Sam Phraya Museum, Ayutthaya) (Chirapravati 2005: 83).

At this stage, the Cotton Road hypothesis remains an interesting speculation. I have presented anecdotal ethnographic evidence and archaeological clues that indicate cultural ties across a broad expanse of largely ungoverned highland territory. It is to be hoped that further research in archaeology and historical linguistics will serve to corroborate this theory.

THE HISTORY OF THE NEPALI DIASPORA IN THAILAND

Migration towards Southeast Asia began in the early years of the British Raj. After the Anglo-Nepal War or 'Gorkha War' from 1814 to 1816, Nepal was defeated by British army in 1816. With the Treaty of Sugauli (4 March 1816), Nepal de facto became a British protectorate from 15 March 1816 to 21 December 1923. Nepali historians and public figures always claim that Nepal was never a British colony, but that was not the perception in Great Britain at the time. On the Commonwealth Memorial Gates, at the Hyde Park Corner end of Constitution Hill in London, inaugurated in 2002 in memory of

[6] Field notes from ethnographic interviews taken in 1990 with Kancha Lama, also known as Ven. Jatila, 65, a Burmese Nepali who, even today, often travels back and forth using the ancient land route between Myanmar and Nepal.

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soldiers who died in the First World War, the 'Kingdom of Nepal' appears on a list along with former British colonies. Similarly, Thai legal documents on Nepali migrants also include Nepal, along with India and Myanmar, as a former British colony.

Recognizing the potential of Gurkha soldiers, British forces started to recruit Nepali Gurkhas into British service as irregular forces. Later they were formed into Gurkha regiments such as the first King George's Own Gurkha Rifles, the second King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles, and the third Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles. In the early years these soldiers were mainly Gurungs, Magars, and Chhetris; later Rais and Limbus and occasionally Tamangs and Newars were also recruited (Caplan 1995). Most importantly, Gurkha service opened an opportunity for many of them to settle in different parts of the British Empire. Today this is manifested in the presence of descendants of these Gurkha settlers in various parts of India, Myanmar, Thailand, and Hong Kong.

Myanmar was colonized by the British Raj from 1824 to 1948 and it was under the British that the major migration of Nepalis to Southeast Asia began. A large number of Gorkhalis, as they were called then, arrived in Myanmar with the British army. It is estimated that currently there are over 500,000 ethnic Nepalis in Myanmar (see Chapter 4 above). In the 1901 census almost 10 per cent of the population of Myitkyina district in Kachin State of Myanmar was composed of 'others', consisting to a large extent of pensioned Gurkha soldiers and their families.

During the Second World War, Gurkha forces were sent to the border of Thailand to stop invading Japanese forces. Many fought bravely, many were killed, and many were captured by Japanese forces and used as forced labour to construct the Death Railway connecting Thailand and Myanmar. When Myanmar became independent in 1948, many Gurkhas joined the infant Myanmar Army and served in the new republic's various campaigns against ethnic insurgents and the Kuomintang invasions.[7] Many Nepalis entered Thailand at the border town of Pilok to work in the tin mines.

7 Some were honoured for their bravery with the title of 'Aung San Thuriya', the highest decoration in the Myanmar army.

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Although a few individual Nepalis entered Thailand even as early as World War I, the major group migration took place only after the Second World War. The Nepali diaspora in Thailand is of two types: PNOs and NRNs. Persons of Nepali Origin who can trace their roots to Nepal but who have taken out citizenship in another country. Many still speak Nepali, alongside one or more host country languages. They tend to retain strong emotional and cultural affinities with Nepal, but kinship ties begin to slip after one generation. The key point is that they are permanently established abroad, away from Nepal. In many cases they have no connection whatsoever with Nepal proper. However, they often create 'Nepali ethnoscapes' in the country where they reside. As Appadurai (1996: 33) remarks, in his definition of 'ethnoscape', this is, "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and persons constitute an essential feature of the world, and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree."

Non-Resident Nepalis (NRNs) (see also Chapter 18 below) maintain their Nepali citizenship but live abroad for various lengths of time. Some are business and professional persons temporarily settled in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, or the USA. These days many NRNs are labour migrants, working at various jobs in many countries around the globe. NRNs also include students, embassy personnel, and Nepali soldiers on assignments with UN peace missions. The key defining characteristic here is the intention to return home; the assumption is that they will return to the homeland in future.

THE FIRST NEPALI MIGRATION TO THAILAND

The Sivakriskul family, though now completely integrated into Thai society, can be considered the first known group of Nepali migrants in Thailand (Figure 5.1). They are well known as a business family and once even appeared on a newspaper list as the nation's tenth-richest family. Ratna (1936–2004), who was 52 at the time of interview (1988), narrated:

> In fact, my lineage is true Thai both in terms of nationality and ethnicity. My ancestors were born in Thailand but I heard from my seniors that our original ancestors migrated from Nepal. We settled down in Bangkok.

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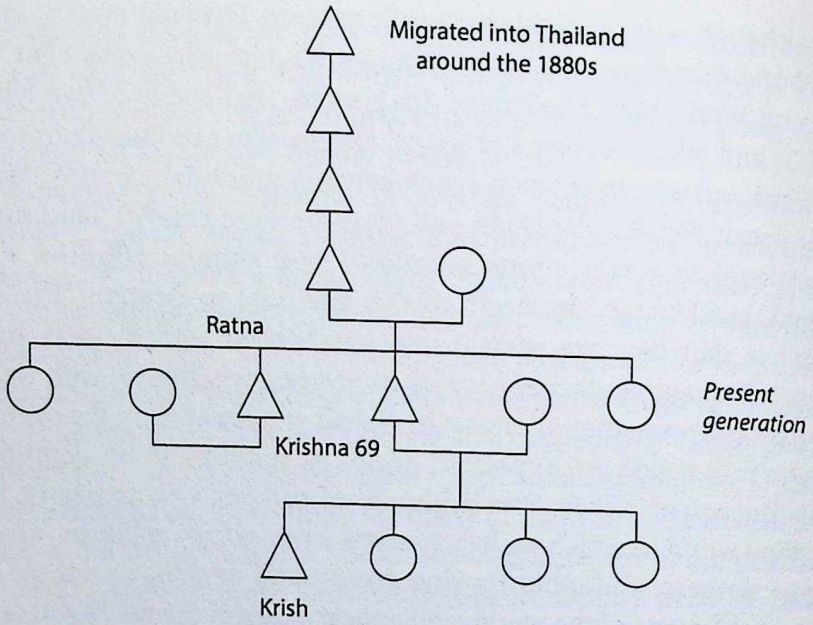

Figure 5.1 Genealogy of the Sivakriskul family.

Source: Respondent interviews.

> We think we were here in Bangkok from the reign of the King Rama V (1868–1910). We were told that my ancestors went back and forth on foot between Nepal and Thailand to bring more relatives to Thailand after they successfully established themselves in Bangkok. Our professions were dairy farming for milk to deliver to the royal palace and our ancestors' home as located at the Seeyeak Khokwua [lit. 'ranch junction'], walking distance to the royal palace, before the construction of Rajadamnern Avenue [before 1899]. Even now we [the older generation] speak Nepali at home.

The Sivakriskul lineage migrated as a family rather than as a part of a large-scale group migration. Ratna Sivakriskul explained: "At home my generation can still speak Nepali. We also love Nepali food and we celebrate all festivals according to the Nepali calendar." But asked if there was anything else to link him and his relatives to 'Nepali identity', he replied: "No. They are Thais in every aspect and they live in Bangkok. They hold Thai citizenship from many generations back. They no longer have links to kin in Nepal and they don't even know where in Nepal their ancestors came from."

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Speaking of himself, he added, "I don't know and I wonder whether any relative of mine is still alive in Nepal." In terms of linguistic identity, only those of Ratna's own generation are or were able to speak Nepali. "Otherwise," he admitted, "the new generation do not speak Nepali these days. My children and grandchildren do not speak Nepali at all." Even Krishna, 69, Ratna's younger brother and a Harvard graduate, prefers to speak English in all the Nepali gatherings he attends.

Another PNO commented on the Sivakriskul family, "Psychologically, they are not Nepali any more. They have totally forgotten their roots because they always refer to other Nepalis in Thailand as 'Khaek'." (As noted above, this is a pejorative term for South Asians.) Despite this, Krishna Sivakriskul often attends business and social gatherings organized by Thai PNOs.

Prior to 1927 there was no law in Thailand regarding aliens. People from neighbouring countries were free to enter and exit the country and there were no restrictions on the jobs they could do in Thailand. On 11 July 1927, the first Immigration Act was enacted which was aimed at preventing the entry of people with infectious diseases. Subsequent Acts were passed in 1937, 1950, and 1979, each superseding the one before. However, the detailed categorization of aliens in Thailand occurred separately in 1972 when the Ministry of Interior officially recognized 17 ethnic minorities, one of which was Nepali (Gazette 2005: section 38 Ka 4). In Thai official terms, Nepali migrants are viewed as a minority who were in Burma prior to World War II. Once Burma became independent, Nepali migrants began to move into Thai territory. They are mostly concentrated in Pilok, a small mining border town in Thong Pha Phum district of Kanchanaburi, west of Bangkok and on the border with Myanmar. The whole area was endowed with seams of tin ore and wolframite minerals, so Pilok possessed one of the first tin mines to be established in Thailand. The total population of Pilok in 2011 was 6,512 or 2,365 households. They comprise Burmese, Mon, Karen, Nepalis, and Thai. The majority are Buddhists. Linguistically, they speak Thai, Burmese, and Gorkhali. Many PNOs in Pilok confirmed that in old days over 50 per cent of Pilok's population were PNOs. In the local election of 18 March 2012 the total population of the constituency Pilok Moo 1 with the right to vote was 1,213 of whom 70 per cent were PNOs. A local Thai resident,

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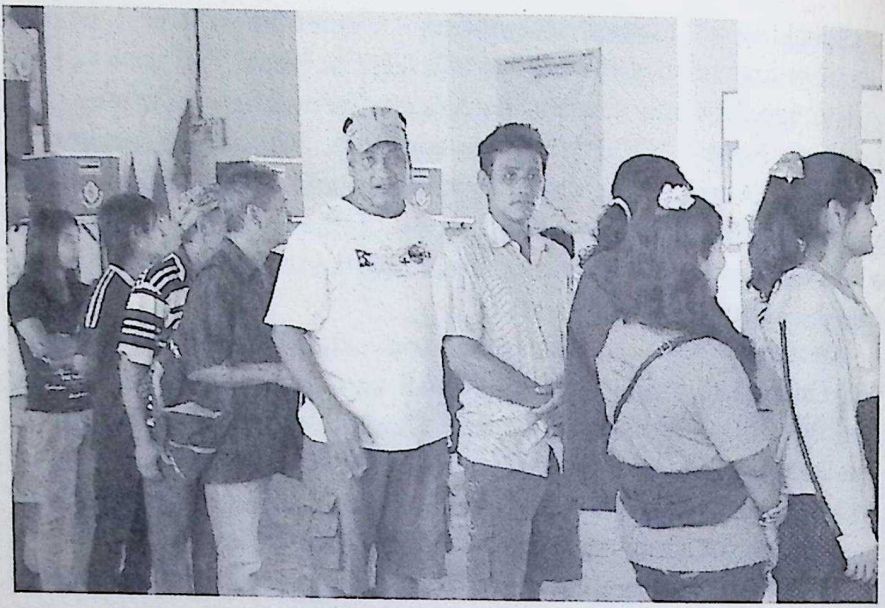

Figure 5.2 The PNOs of Pilok queuing up to vote in Pilok's election centre.

Source: A. Sakya (17 March 2012).

commented, "In this region, if you can win over Nepali votes, you are the winner of any election."

According to Thai official documents of the 1980s, there were 1,026 Nepal migrants in Pilok registered with the Thai bureaucracy and possessing ID cards.[8] The number decreased to 1,106 in a government survey of 1987 (Panprom 1995: 27, 124). In my fieldtrip to Pilok mining town on 17–18 March 2012, however, I only found 7 Nepalis still living in Pilok. All the rest had migrated to Bangkok or other big cities while keeping their civil registration with the Pilok village authority. However, they still return to Pilok to cast their vote whenever there are elections (Figure 5.2).

The ethnic composition of the PNOs of Thailand is varied. The majority are from eastern Nepal, and so include Thakuri, Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Lama, Gurung, Magar, Brahmin, Chhetri, Newar, Kami,

[8] Personal communication with Montri Thawure, 53, a Pilok-born PNO who is the current coordinator for Nepali migrants with the Thai authorities (March 2012; see Figure 5.3 for his family tree).

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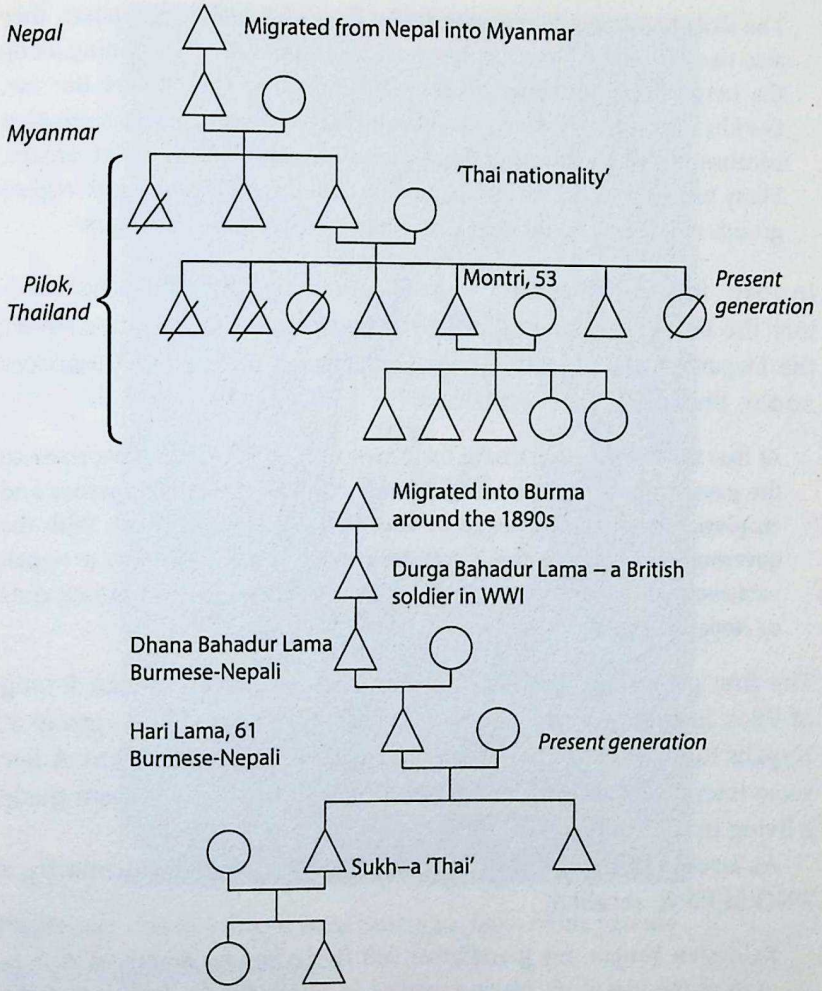

Figure 5.3 Genealogies of the Thawure and Lama families.

Source: Respondent interviews.

Damai, and Sarki. The largest groups are Chhetri, Rai, Limbu, Lama, Magar, Thakuri, and Gurung.

How did these Nepal migrants end up as a minority in Thailand? Bhakdee Santimanirat, 77, a Thai man who has been living in Pilok for over 50 years and is married to a Pilok-born Nepali woman, related:

> From the time of World War I British forces were already mining illegally for tin ore and wolframite minerals along the Burmese and Thai borders.

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> The British didn't only employ Gurkha forces for military purposes, they also used Gurkhas forces or *sipahi* as their labour force in mining along the borders and sometimes deeper into Thai territory. Before the war, Gurkhali people were free to travel anywhere without any documentation because the whole Indian subcontinent was colonized by Great Britain. Many were mercenaries but there were also other Nepali (*khaek Nepali*) groups who migrated directly from Nepal to this region as miners.

In 1939, in order to control what was seen as theft from Thai territory, the Thai government founded its own Mines Organization under the Department of Metal Works (Department of Mineral Resources 2002). Bhakdee further explained:

> At that time Thais didn't have their own mining expertise or workers so the government issued mining permit certificates to private parties and employed those companies to do mining for the government. With the government's consent the company assigned Santa Raj Rai, a Nepali mineworker, as a chief to recruit Nepali mineworkers from Myanmar and/or Nepal, to bring as many as he could to Thailand.

The first group of about 60 Gurkha soldiers arrived in Ban E-tong of Pilok in 1941 (Suksamran 2007). This was the first large group of Nepalis to migrate to Thailand with the government's consent. A few years later, thousands of fellow Nepalis followed. Most of them made a living in the mines.

As already noted, a few preceded them. Santa Bahadur Lama, 75, a PNO of Pilok, recalled:

> Kalu Man Yonjan, my grandfather, left Darjeeling for Southeast Asia in 1926 at the age of 16. Having worked in mines for the British in India for a short while, he travelled to Myanmar and Thailand searching for tin mines. Once he was able to locate mines on the Myanmar-Thai border he then brought other Nepali mineworkers to work in mines for him. He worked as a Nepali *thekedar* or recruiter. He dug mines in the Pilok areas and sold the produce to the British on the Myanmar side. Of course, at that time he didn't know that he was digging mines in Thai territories illegally. He settled himself in Pilok and travelled back and forth between Pilok and Darjeeling. He made a fortune out of the mine business. Later Santa Raj Rai also joined him as a *thekedar*.

Later, when World War II ended and Burma became independent, ex-Gurkhas were displaced, expelled, and became unemployed in

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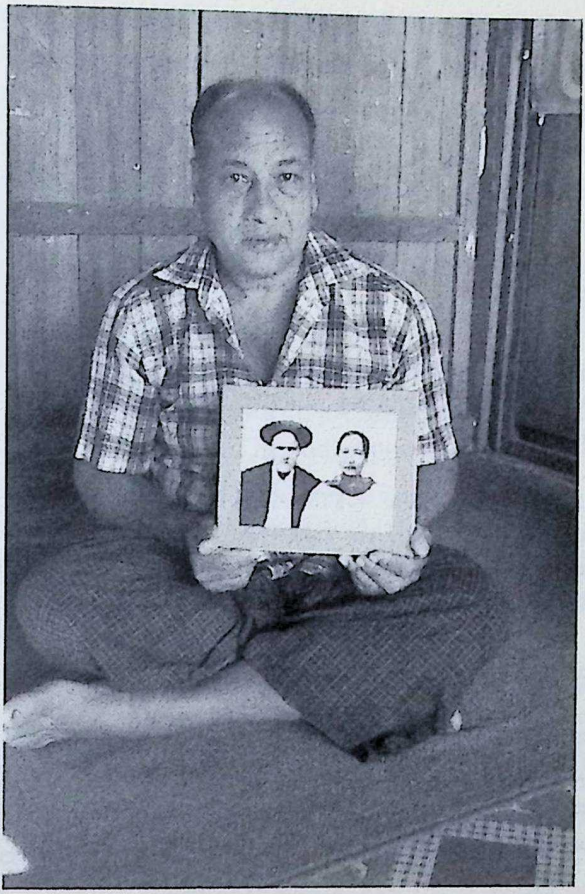

Figure 5.4 Bham Bahadur Rana holding a photo of his parents.

Source: A. Sakya (16 March 2012).

huge numbers. This coincided with the expansion of the mining business in Thailand, and this encouraged a second big flow of PNOs into Thailand. Bham Bahadur Rana (Magar) (see Figure 5.4), 55, who still lives in remote Pilok, explained: "I still have my grandparents' faded official documentation of Gurkha service issued by the British Empire, which is the only documentation I have to prove officially that I am a Nepali." Similarly, Tej Bahadur Chhetri, 80, another PNO originally from Gulmi in west Nepal, who lives in Bangkok, said, "I was 17 years old when I left Nepal to join the army in Myanmar. When

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the war ended, I wasn't included in the list of soldiers who would be returned to their country and was left in Myanmar."

After marrying a Nepali girl in Rangoon, he smuggled himself and his family—without any ID or other documentation—to Pilok to work in a tin mine with other PNOs. There, he and his family settled, along with more than 1,000 Nepalese mineworkers. Thirty years later, in 1985, all mines in the area were closed by the Thai authorities.

Nepali migrants in Thailand never created any problem to the authorities. On the contrary, they earned a reputation for skill and hard work. Santi Amekong, 65, a local Thai and former Pilok village chief, reminisced:

> At that time Santa Raj Rai was the most influential Nepali migrant who could facilitate Thai authority and Nepali mineworkers. He earned love and respect from all the employers and mineworkers. In fact, he was the one who dug a pilot road from remote Pilok to Thong Pha Phum district in order to transport mine products to Bangkok. We Thais owe him a lot.

In the same way, Glennis Setabanddhu, 75, the Australian wife of Somsak Setabanddhu, the owner of Somsak Mining, one of the biggest tin-mining companies in Pilok which used to employ the majority of Nepali migrants, recalled:

> In the heyday of tin-mining (1939–85) the majority of our mineworkers were Nepalis. Unlike other mineworkers, they were skilled, honest, and diligent workers. Everyone loved them. They married within their own groups. They sometimes got into trouble with other mineworkers from local ethnic minorities. Nepalis like to keep cows and sheep in their houses and other minorities didn't like that, because those animals sometimes trespassed on their fields. They were very kind. They delivered us cow's milk on a daily basis free of charge. They don't kill cows but they celebrate their festivals by slaughtering sheep.

Rituraj Pandey, 52, a PNO from Pilok, noted, "Nepalis living in Pilok never create any problem for the Thai authorities. If conflicts arise, we solve them within our own community. Every Nepali ethnic group has their own ethnic governing body. For example, there were Bahun, Gurung, Rai, Tamang, Limbu, and Magar 'Panchen' or chief of ethnic group."

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NEPALI MIGRANTS: FROM 'STATELESS PEOPLE' TO BECOMING THAI

Although, as these oral histories attest, Nepalis migrated to Pilok as early as the 1930s, in the eyes of Thai officials they were stateless, because they lacked documentation to prove their nationality. During the British Empire they were free to travel around without any documentation. Their descendants were effectively stateless. Bhakdee Santimanirat stated, "In those days, they [Nepal migrants] suffered badly. They were restricted from travelling outside Thong Pha Phum district. If they did go out of the restricted areas, police arrested them and charged them with illegal entry. Consequently, their society was closed to the outside world. They only spoke Gorkhali and Burmese; they could hardly speak and read Thai."

Nonetheless, with their reputation as skilled miners, Nepali migrants from Ban E-Tong, Pilok, were able to move on to work at mines in other provinces, including Tak, Ranong, Phangnga, and Phuket. Bhakdee Santimanirat recalled:

> After 1959, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, the Prime Minister of Thailand, invested to open another mine at Chon Mining in Surat Thani province, south Thailand. The company approached Santa Raj Rai of Pilok to provide the labour force. To facilitate those Nepali mineworkers from travel restrictions, the government of Sarit Thanarat issued a special permit for them to travel freely in Thailand.

In a survey made by the Thai government in 1978, PNOs who entered the country prior to 9 March 1976 were classified as 'special displaced Burmese nationality people' (in Thai *phu phlad thin*). Their legal status was similar to Burmese migrants. They were issued with a minority card. However, from 7 December 1984 the Thai government's Department of Provincial Administration placed PNOs in Thailand in a separate category entitled 'Nepal migrants' and assigned them with the 'Green Identification Card' which is used exclusively for Nepalis. Legally, they were not allowed to travel out from the restricted areas unless permission was granted by the Provincial Mayor. First, the restricted area was confined to Kanchanaburi province. Later, when they were permitted to move to other provinces for mining, they were again restricted to the provinces concerned. A Thai legal document records:

> 'Nepal migrants' are Nepalis who have been living in Myanmar before World War II. Both Nepal and Myanmar being under the British Empire

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> enabled Nepalis to migrate into Myanmar. In World War II Japan invaded Myanmar and used forced labour to transport goods for construction of the Death Railway Line connecting Thailand [to Burma]. Nepali migrants were the part of that labour force. This is how Nepali migrants ended up living in Thong Pha Phum district of Kanchanaburi province of Thailand. Currently, they were restricted to reside only within Thong Pha Phum district. They were allowed to be employed on a year-based contract. There were 1,500 of them. However only 957 came to extend their ID card in 1994. (MOI 2000: 1–4)

According to Montri Thawure:

> In fact, in 1976 Thai government issued a law to give citizenship to all minorities and stateless people who have been born and living in Thailand prior to 1976 for the first time, but not many Nepali migrants knew about this as they didn't understand the language and law well. Equally, many PNOs were afraid to register as they believed that once they were registered they wouldn't able to return to Nepal.

A survey made in 1995 of 200 PNOs who were born in Thailand showed that 70.5 per cent of PNOs wanted to go back to Nepal. However, 94.5 per cent completely expressed the desire to obtain Thai citizenship (Panprom 1995: 45). Later, there was a big change in Thai law which benefitted all so-called stateless people, including Nepali migrants. Based on the data of 1976, the Thai cabinet announced a decision made on 29 August 2000 that all illegal entrants (those who were not born in Thailand) were eligible for the status of 'legal entry' (holding a residence permit); and children born in Thailand between 24 December 1972 and 25 February 1992 should be given Thai citizenship.

On 3 October 1995, the Thai cabinet issued another ordinance allowing some 'hill tribe' people who had migrated to Thailand to enter the process of acquiring citizenship. Nepali migrants were included in the list of those to whom this ordinance applied. With the Thai cabinet decision made on 29 August 2000 and 28 August 2001 'Nepali migrants' with a record of civil registration were given Thai citizenship. There were 1,055 Nepali migrants who were eligible to get Thai citizenship in this way. Currently, 865 have already received Thai citizenship. In January 2006 alone, Ministry of Interior granted Thai nationality to 704 Nepali migrants (Khamchoo 2006). Nevertheless,

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the official number may not reflect the reality. Montri's view was as follows:

> 90 per cent of mineworkers in Pilok were Nepali migrants and later they scattered to many mines across Thailand. Unlike in Pilok, Nepali mineworkers in other places already got their Thai nationality from the beginning, so they were not included in that government list. I think most experts in mineworking in Thailand were of Nepali descent. Unfortunately, we don't have any records of those Nepali mineworkers scattered across different parts of the country.

Similar views were also expressed by many other PNOs from Pilok. Today, the majority of PNOs from Pilok have moved to Bangkok. They are now mostly concentrated in Sukumvit 71 and 81 neighbourhoods in Bangkok.

THE LEGAL STATUS OF PNOS IN THAILAND

Up to 14 per cent of Thais are of significant Chinese heritage, but the Sino-Thai community is the best integrated in Thailand. Other minority groups include the Khmer in border provinces with Cambodia; the Mon, who are substantially assimilated with the Thai; and the Vietnamese; and mountain-dwelling tribes, such as the Hmong and the Karen. As we have seen, Nepalis are also legally recognized as a minority under the specific category 'Nepal migrant'. With the new laws and regulations, thousands of PNOs families were entitled to Thai nationality with everything that implied. It meant they could vote and become fully integrated in all aspects of Thai life, including serving in the military.

In 1976 Thailand initiated the Population Identification Code (PIC) system for her population. However, in 1984 the Thai government reintroduced a brand new PIC system. Accordingly, from 1 January to 31 May 1984, Thai government allowed every Thai and person who was a 'legal entry' but never registered before to register their names. The new PIC system consists of a 13-digit string in the format X-XXXX-XXXXX-XX-X, which is assigned at birth or upon receiving citizenship. As shown in Table 5.1, the first digit signifies types of citizenship, the second to fifth the office where the number was issued, the sixth to twelfth are group and sequence numbers, and the last

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Table 5.1 The meaning of the different digits in Thai citizenship numbers

The meaning of the 13 digits of Thai PIC
Digit 1: Type of citizen
1: Legal Thai citizen: People born after 1 January 1984 with parents of Thai nationality and registered within 15 days of birth are allocated digit 1.
2: Legal Thai citizen: People born after 1 January 1984 with parents of Thai nationality but who failed to register within 15 days of the birth receive digit 2.
3: Legal Thai citizens born before 1984: those with Thai nationality or Aliens with Permanent Residence whose names were recorded by the civil registration from the beginning (i.e. prior to 31 May 1984).
4: Legal Thai citizens born before 1984: those with Thai nationality or Aliens with Permanent Residence who have not received PIC numbers. This includes citizens of type 3 who have not received a PIC number.
5: Any Thai citizen who failed to appear in the census; also Thais with dual citizenship.
6: Illegal immigrants, such as minorities or aliens married with Thai citizens.
7: Children of citizens with number 6.
8: Legal aliens or foreigners who are granted Thai citizenship.
9: Members of the royal family.
Digits 2–3: Province of birth
Digits 4–5: District of birth
Digits 6–10: Serial number
Digits 11–12: Type of ID card
Digit 13: Checksum digit

Source: 'Office of the Central Registration Statute on Making Civil Registration B.E. 2535'. Statute No. 151–2, *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, Vol. 125, special section no. 180 nga, published 26 November 2008, pp. 46–7.

digit acts as a check digit. There are nine types of citizenship which are distinguished by the first digit. On 9 December 1984, the Ministry of Interior issued a document allowing children of 'Nepal migrants' who have registered with the civil registration to grant them with Thai PIC number under categories of Thai citizen type 6 and 7.

Among the nine types of Thai citizenship, the PNOs hold all types, ranging from 1–8 as their first digit. However, many of the

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present generation hold their PIC with 3, 5, 6, or 8 as their first digit. Particularly, for 'Nepal migrants' Thai government assigned 13 digits in the format of 6-XXXX-59XXX-XX-X. Digit 6 stands for illegal immigrants and minorities while the 6th and 7th digit, that is, 59, indicates the 'Nepal migrants' group. However, all children born after 1 January 1984 (the year the government introduced 13-digit system) get a card with an initial 1.

Prior to the issuance of Thai citizenship, Nepal migrants were given the status of a minority by issuing a 'white card' in the beginning, and later a special 'green' card which was only for Nepali migrants. There are, even today, a few PNOs who still hold the 'green' minority ID card and who are in the process of getting their Thai PIC with digit 8 as their first digit number. Among those in this category it is believed that many are in fact recent Nepali migrants from Myanmar.

KINDS OF NEPALIS IN THAILAND

The total number of Nepalis in Thailand is unknown and difficult to estimate. They have settled everywhere in Thailand, but mostly in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phuket, Phangna, Surat Thani, Tak, Kanchanaburi, Pattaya, Hua Hin, Ko Chang, among others. Many are fully assimilated and it is difficult to trace their descent. Many have changed their names and lost any links they had to Nepal, but even then they still create 'ethnoscapes' in many ways.

There are at least four categories of Nepali diasporic communities in Thailand. They are:

1. Thai-Nepalis ('Khon Thai'): The oldest Nepali group of those migrated into Thailand directly from Nepal and/or Burma in the nineteenth century.
2. Piloki-Nepalis: Nepali tin miners migrated from Myanmar and Nepal around the 1930s to Pilok mining village of Kanchanaburi province in the far west of Thailand.
3. Burmese-Nepalis: Nepalis who migrated from Burma in the 1970s and 1980s.
4. NRNs: Recently migrated Nepali traders, investors, and expatriates.

Thai Nepalis

The first category of Thai-Nepalis is small in number. Typical of this category is the Sivakriskul family, discussed earlier, who first came

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to Bangkok in around the 1880s. They are now in the fourth and fifth generations who hardly link their descent to Nepal. As noted, they refer to other Nepalis prejudicially as 'Khaek' or 'Khaek Nepal'. Similarly, among the Piloki-Nepali there is a term they used to refer these first category of Thai-Nepali as 'Khon Thai' or Thai people. This is different from the reference they make to a real Thai with the term 'Syang' or 'Siamese'.[9] The younger generation do not speak Nepali, their marriages are with Thais, they no longer use the Nepali calendar, and they celebrate few, if any, Nepali festivals.

Piloki-Nepalis

The majority of PNOs in Thailand are originally from Pilok, Kanchanaburi province, prior to 1945. Based on their oral histories, it is clear that many migrated to Thailand even before World War I. This group of PNOs migrated from Pilok to Thailand's urban areas once the mining closed in 1985. Most of the current generation speak Nepali and celebrate all main Nepali festivals. In some cases, in the process of creating their Nepali enthoscapes, they even learn Nepali, which they never studied formally in their childhood in Thailand. Jayanti Rai, 44, the daughter of Santa Raj Rai, said: "I was not able to speak Nepali as I was brought up among Thais. Only later, once I had to work with PNOs, did I learn the language of my ancestors." The present generation has successfully assimilated with Thais and became fully Thai. For example, the current deputy mayor of Mae Sot, in Tak province, is currently a PNO whose name is Mr Karn Kandnil.[10]

Burmese-Nepalis

With the unrest created by the Kachin independence movement and the Student Movement in the 1970s and 1980s in Myanmar, many Burmese-Nepalis searched for opportunities in other countries. Consequently, many entered Thailand. Many were able to apply for permanent residence of Thailand and/or Thai nationality. However,

9 Thailand was called 'Siam' until 23 June 1939.

10 Appointed by the mayor of Mae Sot City on 25 August 2011.

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the majority of Burmese-Nepalis entered Thailand under the label of 'Myanmar workers'. Many work as labourers in tailoring businesses which are run by other Nepalis and/or Indians. Equally, many work as maids in foreign expatriate and Thai families. Many Burmese-Nepalis have successfully established themselves in Thailand with permanent residence and citizenship. Their adaptation to Thai society and culture is not as smooth as the first two groups. This Nepali diasporic group keeps a close connection with Myanmar, their birthplace and where their family and relatives are. They are very active in keeping their Nepali identity alive with various activities and festivals, both Hindu and Buddhist.

The Non-Resident Nepalis

In the 1960s King Mahendra allowed Manangi traders special facilities to trade in Thailand and Southeast Asia (Ratanapruck 2004, 2007). More recently, as a result of globalization, there is a small community of Nepali expatriates in Bangkok working with international organizations and UN agencies. Although they are few in number, they are a close-knit community who maintain their culture. In addition, there are many expatriates working with international agencies and companies, and others with businesses of their own. This also includes Gurkha families who are employed by the British Embassy in Bangkok. There are over 100 Nepali students studying at the Asian Institute of Technology, and many others who are students in other universities. Similarly, there are around 150 Nepali Buddhist monks and novices studying Buddhism in Thailand. This group of NRNs does not often come to contact with other PNOs. It was only in 2005, with the setting up of the Thai branch of the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA), that a venue for PNOs and NRNs to meet was established. NRNs maintain close connections to Nepal, unlike the other three groups.

CREATING NEPALI ETHNOSCAPES IN THAILAND

Currently, the PNOs in Thailand have migrated from their original location of Pilok to all the tourist centres scattered all over Thailand. They have settled in considerable numbers in at least 12 major tourist

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locations of Thailand. Many work as tailors catering to foreign tourists. The main cities with dense populations are: Pilok, Bangkok, Phuket, Hua Hin, Ko Samui, Khao Lak, Mae Sot, Mai Sai, Chiang Mai, Krabi, Pattaya, and Ko Chang. Within Bangkok the PNOs have settled mainly in Tha Kham, Bang Khae, Silom, Phahurat, Khaosan, Pratunam, Phra Khanong, Siri Phot, and Samrong.

In an attempt to create Nepali ethnoscapes in Thailand, PNOs successfully founded a Thai–Nepal Association on 25 November 2010 which was registered with the Thai government. Moreover, in each city where PNOs are found they have established branches of the association. Similarly, in Bangkok each neighbourhood has formed Thai-Nepal community groups to work together in various activities in the creation of Nepali ethnoscapes.

The Piloki-Nepalis may never have visited Nepal, but they still have a strong emotional affiliation with Nepal. They create Nepali ethnoscapes to keep their identity alive. Phanuphong Limbuprasertkul, 44, who runs a tailoring business and is the President of the Thai-Nepalese Association of Phuket, said: "Though I was born in Thailand, my blood is Nepali. I love to say that. I suppose I'm the third generation Nepalis here in Thailand among nearly 3,000 living just in Phuket." Phuket is an island in southern Thailand, one of the country's best-known beach resorts.

Although they feel Nepali in Thailand, when they visit Nepal it is a different story. Montri Thawure related:

> Upon my arrival as a tourist at Kathmandu airport, unconsciously, I queued up at the Nepali passport holder's counter. The immigration staff saw my red Thai passport and, speaking in English, asked me to go to the foreign counter at the other side. I insisted to him in Nepali that I am a Nepali. The officer was even confused, but looking at my passport as well as my name and surname, which didn't resemble any Nepaliness, the officer insisted that I must go to the foreign counter.

Most PNOs have no direct affiliation with contemporary Nepal. Their memory is fixed on a picture of the century-old Nepal their ancestors came from. They regard themselves as Gorkhali and as speaking 'Gorkhali'. One lady in Pilok told me she could not speak Nepali but only Gorkhali. What she meant was that she could not speak modern Nepali. And indeed her speech was like that of Nepal

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100 years ago. Similarly, many Piloki-Nepalis who have visited Nepal as tourists tell stories about the problems they encountered communicating in Nepali. "Many words we use among Nepali diasporic community are not in use in modern Nepal. So when we speak Gorkhali people in Nepal laugh at us," said Dam Bahadur Gurung, aged 60. Despite this, the Gorkhali/Nepali language is one of the important elements in creating a Nepali ethnoscape in Thailand.

The Piloki-Nepalis have moved into Bangkok and other urban cities. However, they have a tradition of visiting their 'homeland' back in Pilok at least once a year during the New Year celebrations. This is because most Piloki-Nepalis have not moved their civil registrations to their new domiciles. As mentioned above, they mostly return to Pilok to vote in elections (see Figure 5.2).

Since around 2005 every New Year there is a celebration in Pilok with Nepali singing and dancing. In addition, they also actively participate in what is locally called the 'International fog beauty pageant'.[11] Every year the Thai-Nepal Association sends their girls to compete in the local pageant; most of the winners are PNO girls. Montri Thawure pointed out:

> One of the reasons for our gathering at Pilok and putting on Nepali dance shows is to express our gratitude to our birth land and where our ancestors once earned their livelihood. We are Thai of Nepali descent and we were born here in Pilok, Thailand. This is also to keep up our ancestors' traditions. A long time ago [in 1964], when Her Royal Highness Princess Mother paid a visit to the people of Thong Pha Phum district, our grandparents put on a show of Nepali singing and dancing in Her Royal Highness' presence.

Among the four categories of PNOs in Thailand, the Piloki-Nepalis, though they have lost their direct connection to Nepal, are the group, with Burmese-Nepalis, that works the hardest to create Nepali ethnospaces in Thailand. I will discuss how they do this under five headings.

[11] This is geographically unique feature of Kanchanaburi. Pilok, a subdistrict of Kanchanaburi, is cold and foggy most of the year. Accordingly, it is called 'the city of fog'.

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Language

Language is a key indicator of Nepali identity in Thailand. Most Piloki-Nepalis and Burmese-Nepalis of the generation now in their 30s and 40s speak Nepali fluently, although some of the words they use are archaic. However, there are cases where PNOs have lost the Nepali language as they were brought up among Thais. Mrs Jayanti Pandey (Rai), whose Thai name is Phatchamon Champathong, 44, is the daughter of Santa Raj Rai. She was born in Ranong and brought up among Thais and so used to speak no Gorkhali/Nepali at all. Her PIC first digit is 3 which attests her to be a pure Thai. Later she married Rituraj Pandey, 52, whose Thai name is Amornphol Champathong. He is a PNO from Pilok, also a holder of PIC first digit number 3. Jayanti only slowly began to learn Nepali after her marriage, through her work with other PNOs.

PNOs in Thailand work hard to keep the Gorkhali language alive. They encourage its use in the home. In Bangkok they have set up Sri Trinath School to teach Nepali to their children. However, when I interviewed PNO children, many hesitated to speak Nepali. They said they understand Nepali but cannot speak it. Sareena Chhetri, 33, a Piloki-Nepali who was born in Bangkok and is married to a Thai, said, "When I was a child and living with my family, I did speak Nepali, but since I married my Thai husband, I hardly speak Nepali, so it is hard for me to do so now."

According to a survey from 1995, of the 200 Piloki-Nepalis born and living in Thailand with the status of Nepali migrants (Panprom 1995: 41–5), only 34 per cent went to Thai school. Thus 66 per cent did not receive any Thai education at all. This is one reason why they still speak 'Gorkhali' in every family. Moreover, 40.5 per cent admitted that they had problems speaking Thai. However, twenty years on, this is changing, as all children of Nepali migrants are now going to school, in accordance with Thai law.

Naming

Names and surnames are another source of Nepali identity. Most PNOs in Thailand address their children according to Nepali custom. Thus, they call their children according to seniority at birth with the

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terms Jetha, Maila, Saila, and Kancha (first, second, third, last-born) for males and Jethi (or Thuli), Maili, Saili, and Kanchi, among others, for females. In addition to Nepali personal names, many also have quite different Thai names. Some Nepali names fit well with Thai names, since Thais also use Pali and Sanskrit names.

Another very important element of Nepali identity is surnames, which normally indicate caste and ethnicity. Among PNOs in Thailand caste and ethnicity remain valid and important. They still use the archaic terms 'wearer of the sacred thread' (*tagadhari*) for so-called high castes (Bahun and Chhetri) and 'alcohol-drinker' (*matwali*) for what nowadays in Nepal are called Janajatis (and used to be called 'hill tribes' in English). However, many spell their surnames incorrectly when they transliterate them into Thai and many others have switched to new Thai surnames. Because of the problem of transliteration, many Nepali names were adapted by Thai government officers or through personal preference to make them easier for Thais to pronounce. For example, 'Thakuri' becomes 'Thawure', 'Lama' becomes 'Rama', and so on. Many have Thai-ified their surname, for example, Limbu to Limbuprasertkul. Moreover, many changed both names and surnames completely, such as, the example given above: Rituraj Pandey to Amornphol Champathong.

Marriage

Marriage is another major practice which expresses and reproduces the Nepali ethnoscape. The normal Nepali marriage pattern is strict caste/ethnic group endogamy. In Pilok too, although cut off from Nepal, they maintained this marriage tradition. Only now, in the present younger generation, has the endogamy rule been relaxed. Dam Bahadur Gurung, 60, a Piloki-Nepali, said:

> When there is intermarriage between ethnic groups, such as Magar and Gurung, it creates lots of problems in society. The elders of both groups would not accept such alliances. To solve such cross-ethnic alliances, each group has their own caste governing body and after a lengthy discussion and negotiation the couple would be fined for not following the tradition. This problem occurred in my own family. One of my daughters married a man from an untouchable caste, so I cut her off from my family. Only later

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> after long negotiations did I accept an apology and they had to pay fine for their misbehaviour.

Similarly, when Rituraj Pandey, a PNO from Pilok, married Jayanti Rai, daughter of a first-generation Piloki-Nepali, it caused considerable upheaval, because it was an alliance between a 'high-caste' Bahun and an 'alcohol-drinking' Rai. Rituraj Pandey says:

> In my case, although it was suggested to me that I should elope with my wife, I formally asked for my wife's hand in marriage with the consent of my parents. Still I was called for trial by the Bahun community for violating the custom. I had grown up in Thailand so I didn't believe in caste and ethnic discrimination. Therefore, I fought for my rights with the Panchen, the head of the Bahun community. I referred to our rights according to Thai law, instead of archaic Nepali custom, so they didn't dare punish me. However, my in-laws family was put on trial in the Rai community because of our marriage. Finally, my in-laws paid the fine and some wine, before they accepted our alliance. In many cases, such alliances are not accepted and the marriage is forcefully broken off.

Sareena Chhetri, 33, a Piloki-Nepali born in Bangkok, tells a similar story:

> My marriage was arranged by my parents with another very conservative Chhetri family while I was still young. In my husband's family things are very strict with all traditional customs. I had a son with him. Our marriage life was not smooth. It was very difficult for me to follow conservative tradition. I wanted to study like all other Thai girls, but I was not given that chance. After 8 years of marriage I divorced him and married a Thai man. I am so happy now and I don't want to look back at the caste barriers of Piloki-Nepali custom.

PNO families generally discourage their children from marrying with 'Syang' (that is, 'Siamese') people. The preferred marriages for Piloki-Nepalis are within the same ethnic group or at least within the PNO community. In modern weddings, however, it is common to see some assimilation of the ritual between traditional Hindu practices and Thai wedding customs.

Festivals

Another important activity that contributes to the creation of a Nepali ethnoscape is the celebration of Nepali festivals. Nepali festivals

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which are never missed are Dasain and Tihar. During the festival, they perform Deusi Bhailo songs and dance, going from house to house. Santa Bahadur Lama, 75, said:

> When we first migrated to the Siri Phot area in Bangkok from Pilok we lived in the same neighbourhood. So, during Tihar we sing and dance Deusi Bhailo all night long from house to house. Of course, this disturbed local Thai residents who do not understand the festivals. They called the police and the police came to ban the celebration, but when we explained, we were just warned not to make a loud noise. Now all local communities know about our festivals and they come to join with us in celebrating them.

In a similar way many female PNOs celebrate the Teej festival, often by hiring a special venue.

Religion

The majority of PNOs in Thailand are either Bahun-Chhetri or Janajati by background. Among Bahuns and Chhetris the role of the Brahmin priest is essential. Similarly, among the Janajatis the Buddhist Lama and/shaman (*dhami* or *jhankri*) is required. Accordingly, both Bahun Pandits and Lamas are to be found. Under the influence of local culture and religion, many have accepted Theravada Buddhism, but they still keep their traditions alive by following traditional Hindu or Janajati practices for their rites of passage and calendric festivals. In Pilok there are small Hindu and Buddhist shrines for rites and rituals.

The PNOs are a close-knit community who maintain their religion as part of their shared culture. Many Piloki-Nepalis recognize that religious rites and ceremonies became avenues for get-togethers. "We go to the temple to pray, and at the same time meet our family and friends," Dal Bahadur Chhetri said. In addition to religious events, the temples are venues for other social functions. Community meetings are usually held there, as well as weddings. According to Raj Karmacharya, Brahmin priests perform weddings in the Bangkok area for about 50 Nepali couples every year.

There are two Nepali temples in Bangkok: Sri Trinath Devalaya Thai Nepali Samaj for Hinduism and Shanti Bhawan for Buddhism. Both are in Soi Siripot, Sukhumvit 81, a popular area for Nepali settlement, along with Samrong, Soi Onnuj, and the Phra Khanong

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districts. Both buildings are just normal town-houses, but they have been converted into temples. In the Hindu temple there is a PNO Brahmin priest to perform necessary rituals, whereas Shanti Bhawan invites Burmese Nepali Buddhist monks and Nepali monks who are studying in Thailand to organize Buddhist rituals and ceremonies. It is not only in Bangkok that temples have been established that function also as communal gathering places. There are Nepali temples in Phuket and Ko Samui as well. Similarly, there are plans for a Nepali temple in Mae Sot, a border town with Tak province, Myanmar, where there are many Piloki-Nepalis.

The PNOs also actively participate in many Thai Buddhist festivals without any hesitation. "We go to Buddhist temples on Buddhist religious days without feeling awkward," Dal Bahadur said. In Pilok two rural Thai Buddhist temples are well supported by PNOs from Bangkok and other places. Ven. Vinaya Varalabho, 50, a Burmese-Thai from Pilok and the abbot of Wat Muang E-Poo, said, "This temple is mostly supported by the PNOs. All constructions in this temple are made from financial donations by those Piloki-Nepalis. Every time they visit Pilok they come and visit the temple and make merit. There are two Buddhist Wats here in Pilok. Both Wats are supported by the Piloki-Nepalis."

Thus, PNOs in Thailand maintain their caste and ethnic-group practices as family and communal traditions. But at the same time they are committed to Theravada Buddhism as a spiritual system and as the national religion of Thailand. In all their official papers, they record themselves as Buddhist rather than Hindu.[12]

***

Nepal does not share a border with Thailand and there is, as we have seen, little evidence of direct country-to-country migration before 1959. Yet, starting from World War I, PNOs have been migrating into Thailand, especially at the Myanmar–Thailand mining border town of Pilok. For nearly for a century Nepalis have been a part of the

[12] The President of Thai–Nepal Association, a Piloki-Nepali, sometimes used the term 'Sanatan' for 'Hindu'.

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peopling of Thailand. Accordingly, the majority of the PNOs have already fully assimilated into Thai nation building. This is the right time to try and assess the future of Nepali diaspora community in Thailand. The present generation is the 3rd and 4th generations of PNOs who were born in Thailand. There are already two younger generations who have been born in Thailand and have acquired full Thai citizenship. The question is: What kind of Nepali ethnoscapes will be created by the younger generations? What will they be capable of creating?

With the present adult generations of PNOs there is plenty of evidence of a strong attachment to an 'imagined Nepal'. In most houses there is an altar where the Buddha and Hindu gods and goddess are worshipped side by side. Many keep the royal portraits of King Birendra of Nepal side by side with the King and Queen of Thailand (Figure 5.5). It is widely believed among PNOs that it is because of King Birendra that they so easily received official recognition from Thai official authorities. They feel gratitude to King Birendra, even

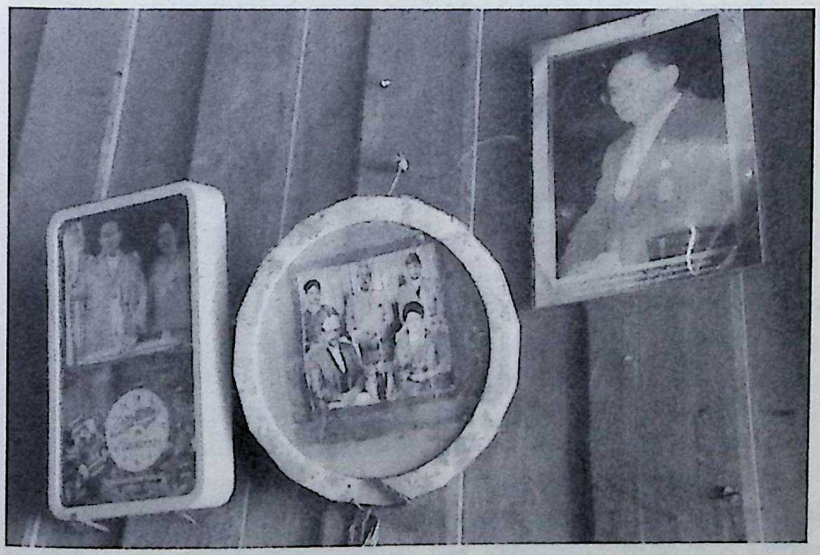

Figure 5.5 Inside a Nepali house in Pilok: A picture of the Nepali royal family is flanked by pictures of the Thai King.

Source: A. Sakya (16 March 2012).

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though most have little knowledge of contemporary Nepal and most have never visited it.

In order to keep their 'imagined Nepal' or Nepali ethnoscape alive, the PNOs work hard to strengthen their community ties through various activities. In 2010 the PNOs successfully founded the Thai–Nepal Association (Central Board) with many branches in different localities (Bangkok, Phuket, Hua Hin, Ko Samui, Khao Lak, Mae Sot, Mae Sai, Chiang Mai, Krabi, Pattaya, and Ko Chang; within Bangkok there are nine sub-branches: Tha Kham, Bang Khae Junction, Silom, Phahurat, Khao San, Pratunam, Phra Khanong, Siri Phot, and Samrong). The Association, made up of senior members of the Nepalese community, is set up much like any other democratic civil society group, with elected members, acting as presidents of certain sections and fulfilling prescribed roles. The association has set up ten different divisions to supervise various activities (social welfare, women, culture, sports, education, organization, youth, social, religion subdivided into Hindu and Buddhist, and outreach). Following the foundation of the association, the PNO community has been organizing Nepali language classes for the younger generations.

Besides the Thai–Nepal Association, there is also another association just for the Kirat or Limbu ethnic group of PNOs under the name of 'Kirat Chumlung'. The 8th annual Kirat Chumlung gathering was held in Bangkok on 8 May 2012. Moreover, in May 2007, the first Nepalese dance competition was held in Thailand and drew around 400 attendees. Apart from being a chance to get together with other people from Nepal and of Nepali descent, it was also a chance to see some of the country's beautiful culture, and the colourful event brought the large and closely knit Nepali community in Thailand to the public's attention. With the help of the internet and YouTube, the younger generation of PNOs is learning new Nepali songs and dances.

For those Nepalis who chose to settle in the city, and raise their children in Thai society, it may not be easy to maintain their Nepali identity and culture, especially among the younger generation who attend Thai schools and hang out with Thai friends. Buke admitted some traditions have been lost. Some marry Thais and marriage between people from different classes is now more acceptable. He said, "We can't stop them [the young]. It's a natural thing to happen, but we try to teach them Nepali culture as much as we can."

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Figure 5.6 Nepalis in Chiang Mai form a procession to celebrate the Thai King's birthday.

Source: R. Limbu (3 December 2011).

With active participation, Nepalis have successfully become a part of local identity wherever they have settled. Nepalis in big cities, whether Chiang Mai in the north or Phuket in the south, participate in all national and local events and festivals as local residents (Figures 5.6 and 5.7). In the public sphere it is now possible for PNOs to display their 'imagined Nepali' identity openly as a part of the local culture. They participate in all kinds of city processions on various occasions where they display not only their Nepali identity through dress and dances, but equally their loyalty to the Thai monarch.

Eager not to be misunderstood, Phanphong Limbuprasertkul attempts to explain his feelings, and in a way manages to sum up the very essence of the problem of wanting to be recognized as part of a separate community, yet wanting to be fully Thai at the same time:

> You know I am not really 2/3rd generation Nepalese; I am really Thai. I love this country and the King. We are proud to live here in this beautiful place. I was born in Thailand and I've been in Phuket for more than 25 years, so I am very much a Phuket person now. We help Thailand and its people, for example, we helped many victims of the recent floods by donating 100,000 Baht to the Governor.

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Figure 5.7 The annual meeting of the Thai–Nepali association, Phuket branch.

Source: M. Khanal (22 November 2008).

Comparing the social status of the PNOs in the past, he added:

> It was also a matter of perception, we Nepalis, at least the 2nd/3rd/4th generations of us, have many more options now because we are more educated and actually aware of how little our ancestors had. My children and future Thai-born Nepalis, can be anything they want. My 16-year-old daughter wants to be a lawyer and my son is interested in joining the army. We want our children to be good people. They have the opportunity to get good education, not like us, so they can do anything. They don't have to just be tailors. (laughs)

It is clear that the Nepali diaspora in Thailand is at a turning point. But with increasing numbers of PNO professionals just a generation away from reaching maturity, its future looks strong.

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6

FIJI NEPALIS

REVIVING CONNECTIONS LOST FOR OVER A CENTURY

Krishna P. Adhikari and *Bhimsen Sapkota*

NEPAL IS PROUD OF THE fact that it was never colonized, but still it could hardly avoid being profoundly affected by colonialism.[1] Thanks to

[1] We are grateful to many people for comments and feedback on an earlier draft: Kavita Maharaj, an Australia-based researcher of Fiji Nepali matrilineal descent; Pravin Gharti (a farmer based in Sigatoka, Fiji) and Anish Singh (an engineer from Sigatoka, now based in Sydney, Australia), both Fiji Nepalis; Bob Adhar (a computer engineer from Suva, now settled in Sydney), a Fiji Indian; Ashok Mishra (an accountant, based in Sydney), a Fiji Indian married to a Fiji Nepali. We are also grateful to Anish's father, an octogenarian and second-generation Fiji Nepali, for reviewing our chapter with his son. We are also grateful to two UK-based retired Gurkha soldiers, Rudraraj Gurung and Tej Bahadur Gurung, who provided valuable information and shared photos of Fiji Nepalis. Similarly, we are grateful to Prayoush Onta of Martin Chautari, Nepal, for making literature on Fiji Nepalis available, and to two anonymous readers for their comments. Last but not least, we are grateful to David Gellner for repeated reading, comments, and editing of the text. We are solely responsible for any remaining errors and omissions.

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the open border between Nepal and India, labour migration is one area where Nepalis have long participated in trends set in motion by the British East India Company. Recruitment of Nepalis into the British military had a significant effect before, during, and after both World Wars and led to significant emigration from Nepal. As shown in other chapters in this volume, retired Gurkhas, along with many other migrants, have settled not just in India, but even farther afield in Bhutan, Myanmar, and Thailand too. Although there is by now considerable work on Nepalis in India, until recently very little, if anything, was known in Nepal about the migration of large numbers of Nepalis to the South Pacific archipelago of Fiji.

Fiji had no formal connection to Nepal or to the Gurkhas. It is the farthest location from Nepal with significant level of Nepali migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike Myanmar and Thailand, Fiji is not connected to Nepal by land, which means that the migrants' link to their motherland has been broken for over 125 years. Despite Fiji Nepalis being a small population in absolute terms (estimated at around 11,000 in 2007) (Koselinews 2013), it may be a surprise to learn that, in the whole world, Fiji (with about 1.2 per cent) is the country with the second-highest proportion of permanent Nepali migrants (after Bhutan).

In this chapter we aim to introduce the Fiji Nepali community and to discuss how this unique migration history forced Nepalis to adopt an accommodative strategy.[2] This strategy resulted in a transformation and the formation of a partially hybrid community. However, a sense of imagined ethnic identification as Nepali—though fading gradually—is still preserved. Limited yet distinct cultural markers are maintained. Nepalis in Fiji are largely assimilated to a broader 'Indian' culture and have (almost) lost their language. In this process

[2] Naming has always been contentious in Fiji; 'Fiji Indian' (as opposed to Indo-Fijian or similar) has now become the widely used term and 'Fiji Nepali' is the equivalent. The report of the 2007 census published by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics uses labels inconsistently. The Constitution of 2013 in its preamble declares all people of Fiji as Fijian and as equal citizens (the term 'Fijian' had previously been reserved for indigenous Fijians). In this paper we use the word Fiji Indian (without a hyphen) or just Indian, and for Nepalis we write either Nepali or Fiji Nepali.

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the forging of a new and broader identity—as opposed to magnifying trivial differences and fighting for a peculiar identity—has not been a unilateral process, but one shared with all early South Asian migrants to Fiji. Because of the shared history of migration and suffering as indentured labourers (*girmitiyas*), class has prevailed over caste (Griffin 1987), ending the caste system as a hierarchical institution that works as a boundary or means of social differentiation and stratification. Thus, it has become possible for the Nepalis to be a part of a homogenizing process out of which there emerged a community of shared culture and identity tracing common roots to the Indian subcontinent. The impact of this process means that Nepali identity as found in Fiji today is very different from what is found elsewhere.

Additionally, this paper aims to illustrate how Nepali diasporic encounters and discourses have spread in a globalized world. In particular, it discusses how Gurkha deployment, on the one hand, and the recent NRNA movement (see Chapter 18 below), on the other, have enabled a new diasporic connectivity, linking an old diaspora population with several new ones. We also look at how multi-layered connections and identities work together with new notions of citizenship and belonging that nation-states are beginning to embrace.[3]

This chapter is based on Bhimsen Sapkota's brief visits to Fiji on five occasions (in 2009, 2012, 2014, 2015, and 2016), as well as on secondary sources such as grey literature (media reports) and published materials. The visits involved interactions with individuals and groups of Nepali origin, observations of their activities, and discussions with government officials in Fiji. He also interacted with the Fiji Nepali diaspora in Australia and observed their activities as a participant and helped them in forming/reviving associations. He served in various honorary roles, including Fiji-Nepal Cultural Envoy, appointed on 19 October 2015 by the Fiji Government. In addition, Krishna P. Adhikari conducted interviews in May 2016 with retired

[3] These trends have nonetheless also given rise to strong countercurrents. Chapter 18 below describes resistance and opposition to the idea of dual citizenship in the Nepali context. Brexit Britain and the rise of Donald Trump in the USA are two powerful reminders of populist opposition to the free flow of people and to expansive notions of citizenship.

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Gurkhas based in the UK who had visited Fiji and interacted with the Nepali community there. One caveat needs to be made here: our study lacks in-depth year-round observation of rituals and festivals, or close observations of kin relationships, for which a detailed ethnographic study would be necessary.

NEPALI MIGRATION TO FIJI

In 1874, when Britain first colonized Fiji, there was a slump in cotton prices and sugarcane farming was gaining momentum. The Australia-based Colonial Sugar Refining Company opened its refineries in Fiji in the 1880s. Labourers were recruited in India to go to Fiji to work in the sugarcane plantations. These indentured labourers signed an agreement which bound them to work for five years after which they could, in principle, walk free. Most of the workers were illiterate, so they signed with their thumb and referred to the agreement as *girmit*; hence they were known as *girmitiyas* (Lal 2004, 2012; Prasad 2015).

Starting in 1879 rural Indians were brought to Fiji from densely populated poor districts in the United Provinces and Bihar, such as Ghazipur, Gonda, Basti, Faizabad, Sultanpur, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur, Allahabad, Jaunpur, Shahabad, and Rae Bareilly. Later, recruitment was extended to south India, and south Indians eventually made up about 25 per cent of total indentured labour (B.V. Lal 2012: 155; Prasad 2015). Recruitment camps were opened in rural areas of India to attract peasant workers. Deceit and exploitation were also sometimes involved in the recruitment process (Gurung 2009; Lal 1980). The indentured labour system was finally abolished due to public outrage in India and Britain in 1917. Around 1.5 million South Asians left the subcontinent in this way, the four top destinations, by a considerable margin, being Mauritius, British Guiana, South Africa, and Trinidad (Brown 2006: 30). Fiji was fifth (Lal 1980: 52), followed by Jamaica and Suriname.[4]

4 It seems very likely that Nepalis were also taken as indentured labourers to other destinations as well. The first author has met researchers who have encountered people in Suriname claiming Nepali ancestry. The well-known writer V.S. Naipaul, born in Trinidad, is of Nepali descent, as his name attests.

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Scholarship on the migration of indentured labourers does not specifically mention Nepalis but it is believed that they came in small numbers in almost every ship. Bir Bahadur Singh, an elder from the Fiji Nepali community in Sigatoka (also known as Singatoka), claimed that in each ship there were about 50, and in some even 100, Nepalis. If these figures are approximately accurate, the number of Nepali labourers would have been at least 5,000 (Sapkota 2015). The actual number was likely to have been considerably smaller than this, but estimates have varied widely.

Out of the 60,965 total number as recorded in emigration passes, and out of 45,439 indentured migrants who left Calcutta for Fiji, 398 are recorded as Nepalis (Lal 1980: 55, 2012: 102, 401; Griffin 1987: 16). This must be an underestimate, a case of under-reporting mainly to avoid the attention of the government of Nepal, which did not approve of the recruitment of its subjects into indentured labour. In the late 1970s Tarte (1979) reckoned the population of the Nepali community in Fiji to be 3,000. Griffin (1987), visiting in October 1981 and March 1982, estimated the population to be between 4,000 and 5,000, while an article from 1988 claimed there were 10,000 Nepalis in the main island of Viti Levu alone (*Himal* 1988).

In calculating the number of Nepalis who arrived in Fiji as indentured labourers, we can discount the smaller estimates given above, first because the government of Nepal and the government in India would not have taken steps to curb migration if the numbers were that low. Second, it is possible to argue back from the current size of the Fiji Nepali population in comparison with the Indian population. Many of the original Indian indentured labourers returned home. It is estimated that about 40 per cent returned home after the *girmit* system was abolished. Many others emigrated at later dates to Australia and New Zealand, for example following the coups of 1987 and 2000. Despite this, the number of Fiji Indians in 2007 census was more than five times the original population. If this pattern holds for Nepalis also, the number of original migrants—after adjusting for the fact that they had few women among them and had to marry with Indians—was probably between 1,500 and 2,000. Estimates of present numbers are equally problematic due to (*i*) the lack of separate enumeration, (*ii*) extensive mixed marriages and consequent diluting of distinct identities, and (*iii*) the fact that Fiji

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discourses and history texts do not distinguish Nepali from Indian identity (Maharaj 2017).

B.V. Lal (1980: 57; 2012: 103) writes that "Nepalis were widely admired in Fiji for their enterprising spirit, but their number reduced substantially after 1894 when the Nepal Durbar discouraged their migration, perhaps so that they could provide recruits for the Indian Army." Similarly, the authorities in India were also concerned at the effects of recruitment of Nepalis in indentured labour on their supply into the Gurkha army (Griffin 1973). Demand for coolies was high even within colonial India and Nepalis were favoured as they were deemed 'racially suitable' for difficult and demanding labour, such as coal mining in North-East India. They were recruited through deception and made to work like as bonded labour (Gurung 2009). Many Nepalis who had walked to India for work were lured into enlisting as coolies to work in Fiji. When the Nepal government tried to discourage their recruitment, some resorted to clandestine means to reach the recruitment centres and even changed their identities. The descendants of the early migrants recount stories told them by their grandfathers, about how they tricked their parents by saying they were going for seasonal and temporary work and would return within four or five months. In fact, they never went back. It appears that British agents visiting Nepal would recruit young men directly from the fields. Kavita Maharaj writes how her great-grandfather, Soorbir Khadka, an 18-year-old boy (from Dhankuta), was approached and recruited while looking after grazing animals. Many recruitees were told not to inform their families, thus inflicting lifelong pain on them (Maharaj 2017).

According to Abinash Singh, quoted in Koselinews (2013), the migration of Nepalis to Fiji took place in two major waves: the earlier recruitment of indentured plantation workers and a later migration of a small number of service workers and free settlers. The first category includes: (*i*) the recruitment of Nepalis who had gone to various north Indian towns, such as Ranchi, in search of work (but also those covertly recruited inside Nepal, and pilgrims tricked by pimps in India) and (*ii*) the recruitment of plantation workers in West Bengal (30 people came from one plantation group) around 1896–7.[5] The

5 Koselinews (2013) cites Pundit Dhurup Sharma, who now lives in Brisbane, Australia, as the source of the latter information.

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later wave of migrants includes a small number of Brahmin priests originating from around Kathmandu who went to Fiji to fulfil the demand for ritual specialists among Hindu communities. Later, two or three additional priests arrived, who had visited Fiji while serving in the British Gurkhas. A few Gurkha soldiers, who served in Fiji during the Second World War, also decided to settle there.

Observation of people's surnames that exist today suggests that Nepalis in Fiji came from diverse caste/ethnic backgrounds. The surnames found, among others, are: Sharma, Neupane, Singh, Khatri, Kharka (Khadka), Thapa, Gharti, Giri, Pradhan, Magar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu, and Tamang. According to Griffin (1987: 23), the largest group to settle in Kavanagasau was perhaps the Gurung, and among Magars there were two groups: Thapa and Gharti. Of those of Indo-Aryan or Caucasoid stock, there were also Thakuris and occupational castes (known today as Dalits), namely, Kami (blacksmiths) and Sarki (cobblers). However, thanks to intermixing, there are also Nepalis whose surnames resemble those of Indians. In the process of forming a casteless society, many first-generation Nepalis (and Indians) changed their surnames to Singh, which is a neutral and now common surname. Brahmins often write Sharma as their surname and perform priestly activities; but by no means all those called Sharma know how to do priestly work. This labour migration likely included very few Nepali women.[6] It seems that some migrants came from eastern Nepal, but others also came from in and around the Kathmandu Valley and from the Janakpur area, as well as from the central western region of Gandaki and Lumbini.

[6] All the available evidence suggests that the Nepalis did not have their own women and had to marry North Indian women (*Himal* 1988; Koselinews 2013; Sapkota 2015). The recruiters preferred single men. However, Prabin Dev Gharti, when reviewing this chapter, contested this. He opined that the first generation of Nepalis had women from Nepal and during the Girmit period they married each other; it was only from the second and the third generation that intermarriage with Indians started. Sudhir Sharma, a taxi driver in Labasa, said that his 'baje' (forefather) came to Fiji with his pregnant wife, four generations ago, who gave birth to a Sudhir (his grandfather) on the ship. Maharaj (2017) also records that her great-grandfather came to Fiji with his wife.

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We do not know how many Nepalis returned after they were freed from their indenture contract. The governments in Fiji and India refused to organize transport; anyone wishing to return had to pay for it themselves. This meant that large numbers did not return.

Panjabi and Gujarati Indians who travelled and settled in Fiji after the 1900s managed to retain personal connections to India. The Nepalis, by contrast, had little choice but to remain there and start a new life. The following story, 'One Person's Journey', published in *Himal* is probably typical:

> Mrs Padarath's father, Ratan Bahadur Singh, was a soldier in the Nepali army at the turn of the century. He heard that the British were recruiting labourers in Uttar Pradesh for the cane plantations in the Pacific. The Rana Prime Minister had asked the British not to recruit Nepalis, Ratan Bahadur left disguised as a sadhu and changed his name so as not to give himself away. The immigrant workers left by ship from Calcutta. Conditions on board were subhuman and many died during the passage to Fiji. When they arrived, the island was far from the paradise that the British had promised. Life was hard and the rewards few. Ratan Bahadur married a lady from U.P. They had five children, two boys and three girls, including Mrs. Padarath, who was born Shiva Kumari. Disillusioned with life in Fiji, Ratan Bahadur returned to the Sub-continent with his two sons, Dal Bahadur and Nar Bahadur, promising to be back. Little is known about what happened to them. The family heard that Ratan Bahadur had died during the time of Partition, as he was making his way on foot back to Nepal. Mrs. Padarath´s parents and siblings are all dead, as is her husband, who was a headmaster in Fiji ... (*Himal* 1988: 9)

Initially Nepalis settled along with Indians in the area known as the sugarcane belt of Fiji. They started *girmit* in areas near Suva, the capital city, and settled in another nearby large city Navua. From there they moved to other districts, including Sigatoka. Today the majority of Nepalis are in the Sigatoka valley, particularly in the rural areas of Kavanagasau and Sand Dune. According to local sources the first Nepalis to have moved from Navua to Kavanagasau were Bam Bahadur Singh and Ragubir Singh and their family.[7] The first settlers, free from indenture, went there in 1914. The major factor that attracted them to Kavanagasau was the terrain, with its mountains,

7 Bob Adhar (personal communication).

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valleys, and rivers, and the possibility of cultivating rice and sugarcane on freehold land. Today, Sigatoka valley is home to about 6,000 Nepalis.[8] Sand Dune, which is adjacent to Kavanagasau and locally known among Nepalis as *Balu Pahad*, has in particular, a large Nepali population. In this mountainous valley, which reminds one of the hills of Nepal, the village of Kavanagasau alone is home to about 2,000 Nepalis (Koselinews 2013). In Kavanagasau, the main concentration is in the hamlet of Helambu, named after the region northeast of Kathmandu, and in the neighbouring settlements of Yalasa and Yalava (Tarte 1979). The Nepali community has also spread to the sugar towns on the western side of Viti Levu (Ba, Lautoka, and Rakiraki), near Suva (Navua, Nausori), and on Vanua Levu, in Labasa (Griffin 1987: 16).

Once the labourers were freed from the sugarcane plantation, Nepalis, like others, started leasing land and maintaining their own farms, where they cultivated sugarcane, rice (which is now in decline), fruits, and vegetables; they also kept goats and cows. There has been some limited diversification among Fiji Nepalis to other fields, such as fishery, trade, and work in the service sector. A few have even served in the Fiji Army and Fiji Police Force. Though most have remained as subsistence farmers, a few have migrated to the urban centres. In recent decades about 200 Fiji Nepali families have migrated to Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. The story of Charoiette Ram Padarath, already cited above, was published in *Himal* in 1988 when she was 70 years old. She had been an English teacher in Suva and migrated to Vancouver in her retirement. "Her two daughters, both nurses, live close by in Vancouver and her two sons in Australia and New York. ..." (*Himal* 1988: 9).

This movement of Fiji Nepalis between 1879 until today can be illustrated in a three major stages (see Figure 6.1): before 1918 from Nepal to India and to Fiji; between 1918 and 2016 within Fiji (rural settlement and movement, and lately small urban flows); and from

[8] This could be an overestimate in view of the fact that Griffin recorded the population as being between 1 and 3,000 in 1981–2. Given the absence of reliable data, the real figure may have been as low as between 500 and 800 (Griffin 1987: 22).

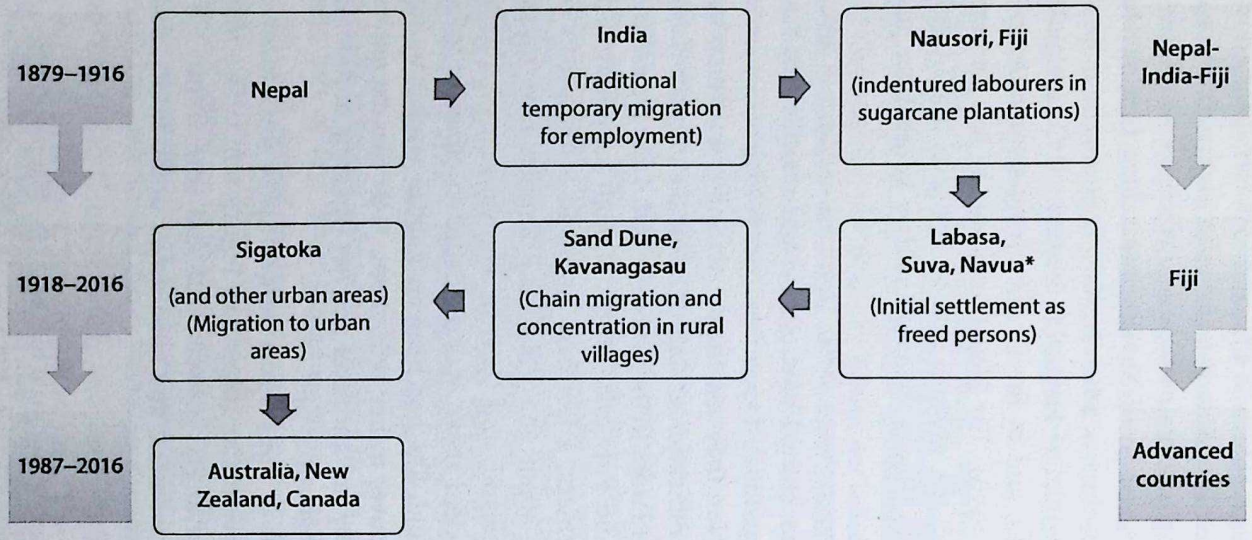

Figure 6.1 Flow chart showing the movement of Nepalis to Fiji and beyond.

Source: Authors.

**Note*: Some indentured labourers came directly to Navua, which is on the outskirts of Suva, the capital city of Fiji.

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1987 to 2016 (small-scale international migration). Even though the Nepali community has scattered in different places in Fiji and abroad, Kavanagasau still "remains its home and spiritual centre" (Mangubhai and Mugler 2003: 437).

CULTURAL CHANGE AND THE FORMATION OF A FIJI INDIAN IDENTITY

Despite the diversity of sub-cultures and places of their origin within Indian sub-continent, the indentured labourers to a large extent have formed one overarching identity as a Fiji Indian. Fiji's constitution of 1997 (section 55: 4b) defines Indian as a collective term encompassing anybody who can trace, through either the male or the female line, their ancestry back to anywhere on the subcontinent of India. This contrasts with the label 'Asian' used in the UK to refer to people from South Asia (ONS 2009).

According to the 2007 Census of Fiji, Indians, defined in this broad sense, constitute about 38 per cent of the total population. This is the second-largest group after the majority indigenous Fijians (known as iTaukei), who constitute 57 per cent of the population. According to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2007), between 1996 and 2007 there was a 7 per cent decline in the Indian population, due to emigration, whereas there was a 21 per cent rise in the indigenous Fijian population. The decline of the Indian population is stark in rural areas, whereas the population in urban sectors has slightly increased. Between 1956 and 1980, the Indian population had formed a majority in Fiji.

Religiously, the Indians fall in to all four major categories: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Sikh. About three quarters of Fiji Indians are Hindu and 16 per cent are Muslim. About 10 per cent are Christian, who belong to 18 officially recorded categories: the largest (followed by about a quarter) is the Assembly of God, the second Methodism. About 1 per cent of Fiji Indians are Sikh. The proportion of Indian Christians has risen gradually, while that of Hindus has declined. The major reason for decline in both the overall Indian population and number of Hindus is the exodus of Indians after the 1987 and subsequent coups, and ensuing attacks on Fiji Indians, their property, and cultural monuments (Trnka 2002, 2008).

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Originally, about 80 per cent of the indentured labourers from India were Hindus, who followed diverse ritual practices (B.V. Lal 2012: 46). As most could not return, or did not wish to return, to India, they started to live together as an Indian community. Their struggle to secure fundamental rights and the formation of a collective identity went hand in hand for many decades. The reformist Hindu group, the Arya Samaj, played a central role in forging and forming a distinct Hindu group in the early years, but over time the orthodox Sanatanist form of Hinduism (but with reformed religious activities) has become dominant, which is reflected in the increasing importance of Diwali and the decline of Holi as the main Hindu festival (Kelly 1988). Koselinews (2013) reported that Manoj Singh, a descendant of Nepali migrants to Fiji was the Coordinator of the Sanatan Dharma Seva Samiti, of Fiji and Australia, in 2013.

Kelly (1995: 483) has emphasized the differences within the Fiji Indian population: between generations, rural and urban, Gujarati traders and sugar growers, north Indians versus south Indians, Arya Samajis and Sanatan Dharmis, Hindus, and Muslims. But, no doubt in large part because of the specific racial cast of colonial and postcolonial politics, a Fiji Indian identity has emerged that transcends these religious, cultural, and historical boundaries. Apart from the religious reforms, there have been other changes, adaptations, and inventions. The evolution of Fiji Hindi (or Fiji Hindustani) as the lingua franca of Fiji Indians is one such example. It has come to prominence since the 1960s and is a hybrid version of Hindi, influenced by a variety of dialects, principally Awadhi and western Bhojpuri, with borrowings from Fijian and English (Mangubhai and Mugler 2003: 377). Most of the new generation of Fiji Indians are bilingual and speak fluent English and Fiji Hindi. In a similar way, a highly significant innovation among Fiji Indians is the discontinuation to a large extent of caste as a system of social hierarchy of ritual purity and the abandonment of caste endogamy, extending even to religious exogamy (marriages between Hindus and Muslims).[9]

9 A small minority of Punjabi and Gujarati people, who migrated later as free persons, restrict their marriages within their community. Ethnic endogamy has remained an ideal, rather than actual practice, these days. During fieldwork we sensed a belief among some respondents, Nepalis and relatives of Nepalis, that marrying Nepali women helped the marriage to survive (*ghar hunchha/banega*).

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The original indentured labourers were a diverse group, including both high- and low-caste Hindus and high- and low-status Muslims (B.V. Lal 2012: 106). The migrants were illiterate and impoverished peasant labourers, most of who could not return to India. Essentially, they were of a similar class and were thrown together in conditions that made the maintenance of commensal separation impossible. Once freed, they moved collectively and needed reciprocal support in their new settlements and economic ventures. There was an acute shortage of women in the early days, which forced them to break all the barriers of caste, and even religion, when seeking partners.[10] The long sea journey, crossing the *kala pani* (dark water), should have had a levelling effect because according to the traditional Hindu belief system crossing the dark water was considered polluting. Caste as practised in the Indian sub-continent virtually died out (Jayawardena 1971). What remained was the use of Brahmin *pandits* to perform priestly activities. Koselinews (2013) quotes a schoolteacher called Singh saying that his grandfather came to Fiji disguised as a Brahmin priest but, once he was identified as a Chhetri, he had to work on a sugarcane farm.

Cultural and religious links to the homeland have enabled the emergence of a common culture. Bollywood movies are popular among migrants from the Indian subcontinent in Fiji just as they are in South Asia. They form a cultural thread connecting South Asian diaspora everywhere. These movies have also influenced the shaping of Fiji Hindi as a lingua franca.

NEPALI IDENTITY AMONG THE FIJI NEPALIS

As discussed earlier, in the class sense, the Nepalis were not much different from their Indian colleagues. Many of them had already spent time in India as labourers and would have been able to communicate fluently in the languages of their southern neighbours. Similarly, coming from Nepal, where Hindu practices had at that time the force

[10] Fiji Nepalis recall that the male to female ratio among indentured migrants was of the order of 3: 1. Lal's figures (2012: 218) also indicate a huge disparity.

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of law, the Nepalis would have had no problem in sharing, adapting, and practising Hindu culture and festivals, even if they were observed differently from in Nepal, and even if they were themselves a diverse group of people. Nepali men married Indian women, and their offspring became Nepali even though they carried blood of an Indian mother. In the second generation they tried to marry within the Nepali group. In fact a bond of bread and butter (*roti-betiko sambandh*), which is common in the Indo-Nepal border region, became a reality among Fiji Indians. The self-identification of belonging to Nepali ethnicity stems from the idea of patrilineal descent, that is, the genitor of the mixed-marriage children should also be offspring of a Nepali biological father (Griffin 1987). As an extension of this relationship, in 2015 the Nepalis and Indians from Fiji now settled in Australia formed an association called Fiji Indian-Nepali Inc. to promote mutual relations and also Nepali culture, language, and identity. Even Nepalis from Nepal living in Australia have joined the group.

By the late 1970s when Tarte (1979) visited the community, he found a "strong sense of distinct identity" but few people knew Nepali "dialects". Furthermore, Griffin (1987: 23) who visited the Nepali community in 1981, reported that "nearly all differentiating features of the community have disappeared, including language and dialects." Today hardly anyone in the third and fourth generations of Fiji Nepalis speaks Nepali beyond some kinship terms and few ritual words (Mangubhai and Mugler 2003: 437). During field visits, the following words were observed as still in use among Fiji Nepalis: *ketaketi* (children), *swasni* (wife), *bhauju* (sister-in-law), *daju* (brother), *kheti* (crops), *tarkari* (vegetables), *bhale* (rooster), *boko* (he-goat), *bakhra* (goats), *dashai/Dasahara* (Dasain festival), *gundruk* (dried fermented vegetables), *chyang* (home brewed wine), *topi* (Nepali hat), and *khasi* (castrated goat). Fiji Nepalis are politically identified as part of the Fiji 'Indian' category (and are perceived by the indigenous Fijian as Indians). They know that their ancestry is in Nepal, but most cannot say which part of the country their grandfathers came from or what his clan name was.

During the Second World War, Gurkha soldiers came to Fiji and a very small number settled in Lautoka. These Gurkhas, with their Mongolian physiognomy, are not assimilated to Indians. They maintain relations with Gurkhas settled in countries like Papua and the

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Solomon Islands. Their lack of racial mixing has led others to regard them as "Chinese uncle and aunties" (Koselinews 2013).

Despite the cultural assimilation or innovation of modified forms of culture, there are still a few things that are unique to Fiji Nepalis. The survival of a distinct sense of Nepali identity even at unusual places and circumstances had drawn Griffin to study the community in 1981–2. Behind such ethnic identification Griffin (1987: 21) presents three features of the community: (*i*) the sense of family and kinship, (*ii*) the role of the feast of Dasahara and temple of Shiva, and (*iii*) the use of alcohol and the presence of the Fiji-Nepalese Association.

Apart from celebrating Holi and Diwali with other 'Indians', they celebrate Dasahara (vernacularized as Dasain in Nepal) with greater importance as a collective community activity (a diasporic feature seen in the UK and elsewhere, as opposed to individual, family, or clan-based observation in Nepal) as well as a household ritual. But quite similar to Nepal, they too sacrifice goats or fowls on the ninth day of Dasahara at a communal temple. They eat a curry made of blood (*rakti*), while they also perform Durga puja for nine days with prayers and abstinence. On the tenth day, as in Nepal, they celebrate with family reunions, eat and drink, and serve one of the surviving and most distinct Nepali foods, namely, *sel-roti* (sweet rice flour ring bread cooked in deep oil). Similarly, they celebrate Tihar or Dipawali (the festival of light) and place the long multi-coloured mark (*sapta-rangi tika*) on their forehead as in Nepal. The use of the famous curved Nepali knife (*khukuri*) to sacrifice birds and animals adds a special ethnic dimension to an otherwise religious festival (Griffin 1987: 25).

A temple of Shiva was constructed at the foot of the hill of Kavanagasau in Helambu when the Nepalis first settled there in 1914. In nostalgic memory of Nepal's high mountains, they named this small hill Himalaya Parvat, though it bears no snow (*him*). The original modest temple had a statue of Shiva, a *lingam* with a *yoni*, with a statue of Parvati, a shelter and grazing cow. Griffin observes: "On the meadow terrace against the backdrop of Himalaya Parbat the mandir exuded a sense of peace and reflection; the appropriate figure of a grazing cow was quite obvious to my presence. The temple played a significant role in continuing with the religious worships and traditions among the Fiji Nepali communities" (1987: 25). The temple

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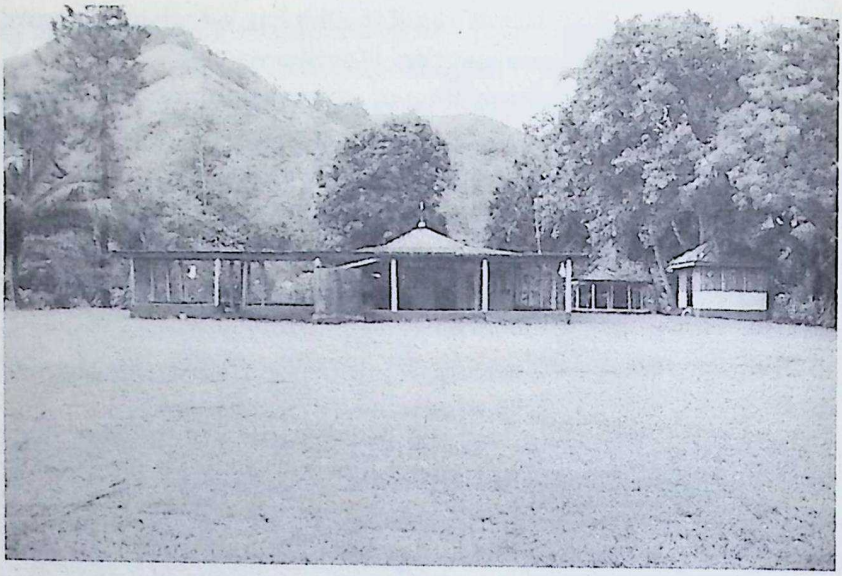

Figure 6.2 The Pashupati Temple in Helambu, Kwanangasau, Sigatoka, Fiji.

Source: Bhimsen Sapkota (18 October 2015).

was demolished in 1981 and a new one was built in 1982 by visiting Gurkha soldiers.

According to Griffin, the consumption of alcohol was a distinct ethnic feature among the Fiji Nepalis from the beginning. During the time of indenture, they were allowed by the British to purchase liquor without a licence while that 'privilege' was not available to Indians and Fijians. Until the 1960s, they continued to ferment *jand* (rice beer) at home for personal consumption, exactly as happens in Nepal. Of particular ethnic importance, the community pulled together and raised money to fight a legal case in 1943 when a Nepali in Suva was charged for buying alcohol without a permit. When the case was dropped, several Nepalis, including Tommy Kalika, Kharak Bahadur Singh, and Abhiram Singh (Kharka), decided to found the Fiji Nepalese Association. The organization shifted to Kavanagasau, became weak by the 1980s, and went dormant after that.

There are other important reminders of Nepal among Fiji Nepalis. First is their settlement in mountainous valleys with a uniquely mild temperature and a settlement pattern reminiscent of Nepal and with

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Nepali names such as Balu Pahad, Helambu, and Himalaya Parvat. "Kavanagasau is the one place in Viti Levu with mist-shrouded hills and valleys, landscape guaranteed to appeal to anyone homesick for the Himalayan foothills" (*Himal* 1988: 9). A second factor is the production and consumption of fermented and dried leafy green vegetables (*gundruk*). In the month of December one finds dried green broad-leaf vegetables in the courtyards of Fiji Nepalis just as one would in Nepal. Third, the Nepali-style cap or *topi* is still worn by a few men on special occasions. Moreover, with their subsistence agriculture economy and lack of involvement in political activities, they have been able to cultivate a reputation as a hardworking, honest, and peaceful people.

Despite the distinct country of origin, ancestry, and preservation of some cultural markers, Nepalis in Fiji are defined constitutionally as Indians, and remain unrecognized as a separate census category. There is a recent call for due recognition to the origins and contributions of Fiji Nepalis and rectification of "all references to the Indenture Labour System in Fiji's history books" (Maharaj 2017).

REVIVING A LOST CONNECTION

Even today, few Nepalis in Nepal are aware that there are people of Nepali origin in Fiji; they are invariably surprised to learn of it. A few Nepali professionals, working for international organizations such as the UN, have visited Fiji in recent years. There are also a handful of Nepali chefs in Suva, brought from India by Gujarati entrepreneurs to work in their restaurants. Many of them are either not lucky enough to meet Fiji Nepalis or are not interested to interact with them. In recent years, a small number Nepali students have been to Fiji to study, especially IT courses. However, nobody has had any in-depth engagement, nor has maintained any lasting relationship with the Fiji Nepalis. On the part of Fiji Nepalis, even though a few of them have visited their Indian kin in India, very few have made such a venture to Nepal.

Nepal and Fiji established formal diplomatic ties in 1968. After the rise of a Fiji Indian, Mahendra Chaudhry, to power as Prime Minister in 1999, Nepal and Fiji tried to strengthen diplomatic relations. However, until 2013 nothing specific had been done to connect the two communities.

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Hong Kong-based Gurkhas were the first group to have contact with Fiji Nepalis. In the last five decades British Gurkhas have been to Fiji from time to time for training and jungle exercises. There was almost a tradition for each of these Gurkha groups to be invited by the headman (*mukhiya*) of a 'Nepali village' for a party and cultural exchange.[11] Among these lucky Gurkhas, one is Rudraraj Gurung from Lamjung, Nepal, who is now settled in Reading, UK. He recalled his visit to the Nepali village in Fiji this way:

> The elderly *mukhiya* of a Nepali village had somehow got information about our arrival in Fiji. He invited us to his village, but he died before we reached there. It looked as if it was a wedding party. A makeshift kitchen was constructed outside with a tent set up for us to sit in and do our activities. Upon arrival they gave us tea/coffee, Nepali-style bread (*selroti*), and chutney. They had cut a goat. They served us the main meal. We had a greetings programme. The son of the headman, who replaced his father in his new role, gave us a lecture about the Nepalis there. He said, "Having Nepalis visit our village gives us a feeling of being in Nepal. Passed down from our grandfathers and fathers, what we have learnt, despite some changes, still makes us feel proud to be a Nepali." They made very touching (*marmik*) remarks: "We have lost the Nepali language. If we had somebody to teach us the language, we would feel very fortunate. We wish we could have someone from Nepal (speaking Nepali) to have marital relations (*bihebari*) with us." There was an old lady (*bajai*) of Mongolian face. She gave red *tika* to all the Gurkhas by turn. They showed us their cultural dance. We too performed ours for them. We stayed till late (1 or 2 o'clock in the morning). Later they took us in groups of four or five to their houses to sleep. Both on arrival and on leaving we played our military band music to express our honour and solidarity with them. Many of us remained in penpal relations for many years. (Interview with Krishna Adhikari, 29 June 2016)

The temple of Pashupatinath, which the Gurkha soldiers left behind in Fiji, is now tended by a group of Indian Hindu women. When Sapkota visited it in 2015, local Fiji Nepalis expressed the view that, since it was rebuilt by Gurkhas and is named after Nepal's main

[11] It seems probable that these programmes were organized by the Fiji Nepalese Association rather than by the chief of the village, though there could have been an overlap of roles (Griffin 1987: 26).

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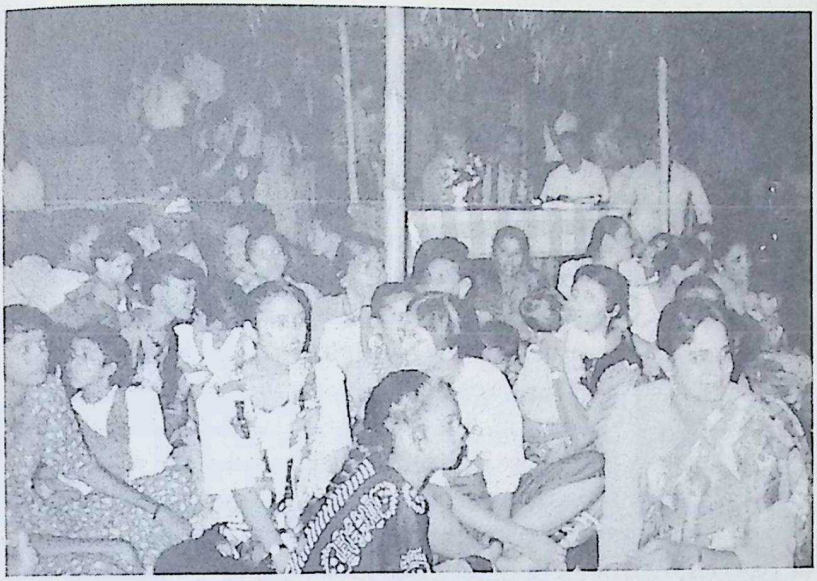

Figure 6.3 Fiji Nepalis at a function for visiting Gurkha soldiers in Sigatoka, Fiji.

Source: T.B. Gurung (May 1996).

Hindu shrine, they should be in charge of the temple. Two members of the Nepali community have now been included in the management group.

As Nepali migration to Australia and New Zealand has increased in recent decades, the existence of the Nepali community in Fiji has received more publicity. So far three newspaper articles have been published about the Fiji Nepalis targeting readers with an interest in Nepal and its diaspora (*Himal* 1988; Koselinews 2013; Sapkota 2015). The recent interest on the part of Nepalis has been reciprocated in that the Fiji government has for the first time appointed a Fiji-Nepal Cultural Envoy (the second author of this chapter) with the aim of promoting cultural connections between the two countries and the concerned communities. Before this appointment he also carried out some cultural and religious activities among Fiji Hindus, including providing training to Ramayana Mandalis and *pandits* about priesthood.

In recent years, Fiji Nepalis, and their Indian kin living in Australia, have begun to show interest in providing support to Nepal.

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The formation of Fiji Indian-Nepali Inc., mentioned earlier, is one example. At the time of the 2015 earthquake Fiji Indians living in Australia came together to form the United Fiji Community. The Community provided assistance to rebuild Kalikadevi Secondary School in Pipalchaur, Melamchi Municipality, Sindhupalchok.

For the past few years, the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) has been trying to expand its organization to Fiji and to bring the Fiji Nepalis on board (see Chapter 18 in this volume). The NRNA committee led by Jiba Lamichhane (2011–13) tried to form a National Coordination Council in Fiji but without success. The present committee led by Australia-based Nepali millionaire Shesh Ghale also aims to expand the NRNA in Fiji, but so far there has been little progress. Fiji Nepalis ask: "How does it benefit us to assert that we are Nepali?" (*hami Nepali ho bhanda ke phaida hunchha?*) (Koselinews 2013). Fiji Nepalis rightly want to identify more as Fijian than as Nepali. It could be risky for them if they are perceived to be trying to forge a new non-Fijian identity and allegiance. In this sense it can be inferred that the idea of the NRNA works better with and for Nepalis who have become NRNs in recent years and have some active diasporic connections to Nepal.

Despite this, the emotional attachment of being Nepali among Fiji Nepalis (as an imagined diaspora) is high. Perhaps for the first time in the 138-year history of migration to Fiji, a memorial service was held in 2015 to remember those who lost their lives on 11 May 1884 when the transport ship, the Syria, carrying indentured labourers, was wrecked on Nasilai reef (B.V. Lal 2012: 157). This programme evoked an emotional sense of a Nepali identity. Altogether 69 people died in that incident. It is not known how many were Nepalis, but it is known that, of the total passengers on board, two and a half percent were Nepalis (B.V. Lal 2012: 157).

The Fiji Nepalese Association, created in the 1940s, has been mentioned above. Founded in Suva, it shifted to Kavanagasau and provided national recognition for activities organized locally. According to Griffin, it had significant social functions, including receiving visitors from Nepal and exchanging gifts with Gurkhas (1987: 26). However, from the 1980s it was largely inactive. In December 2015, this organization was revived and rebranded as the Fiji Nepali Association, led by Pravin Dev Gharti as the Chairman and Bijendra Singh as the

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General Secretary, with a Board of 13 members. The committee aims to build and promote Nepali identity, language, and culture (Sapkota 2015). In 2016 they organized a small Nepali language session. The Association has applied to the Fiji government for funding and other facilities.

MULTI-LAYERED DIASPORA AND NEW CONNECTIONS IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

The Fiji Nepali community presents a unique case of Nepali migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which was forgotten in Nepal until recently. There are similar cases of Nepali migration to other countries, for example, in Pakistan. What is different in the latter cases is that the size of the community is small and it has fully assimilated to the dominant groups by converting to Islam. Even in the Thai case (see Chapter 5 above), though the community is much larger, it too has assimilated to a considerable extent. In the Fiji case, Nepalis have assimilated not to the 'indigenous' majority but to the Indo-Fijian community.

However, unlike the main Fiji Indian community, Nepalis have not had easy or frequent links to their 'home country'. The Indian community in Fiji has mostly maintained links to India. New, free settlers have arrived, either as priests or merchants. In 2004 Mahendra Chaudhry, a former Prime Minister of Fiji, even received the coveted Pravasi Bharatiya Community Service Award.

Despite a lack of connection, and hybridization, this chapter has demonstrated that many Fiji Nepalis, mainly in Sigatoka valley, self-identify as Nepali and have preserved markers that help to preserve a distinct ethnic identity. Their Nepali identity is maintained through patrilineal descent, with internal diversity completely eroded. They continue to idealize the homeland that they have never visited. A lady from Kavanagasau in her 50s expressed her fantasy in this way: "After getting off the plane, I will first worship the land (the earth goddess), and apply the earth to my body and forehead. I have so much love for Nepal. I always think that one day I will go to Nepal."

The global diaspora movement among Nepalis is relatively new (Chapter 18 below). Waves of migration create over time a multi-layered diaspora, with the different layers possessing varying degrees

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of cultural and social embodiments and allegiances, and different degrees and kinds of nostalgia for the country of origin. As a rule of thumb we can say that the older the layer, the more imagined the diaspora, and the newer the layer, the more it is lived with experience of both home and destination countries. Time (generation), distance to the place of origin, means of and reasons for maintaining connections, and level and conditions of integration in the new place are important factors shaping the level of diasporic intensity, belonging, and connectivity to the country of origin. Nepalis in Fiji have three identities: Fijian (universal Fijian citizenry as enshrined in the Constitution of 2013), Fiji Indian (politically and culturally a hybrid identity, which is the second-most important in pragmatic terms), and Fiji Nepali (de facto and emotionally important, yet faintly diasporic, and least important in pragmatic terms). In the lived sense, their home country is now Fiji.

Fiji Nepalis who have moved to New Zealand and Australia have affiliated to Indian-Fiji organizations. Some in Fiji are also members of the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin. There are about 150 Fiji Nepalis in Australia, many of whom come together to celebrate Dasain and Dipawali and to organize other collective activities. There are about 60 Fiji Nepalis in New Zealand (Koselinews 2013). They are likely to participate in the activities of Nepali organizations in Australia and New Zealand, just as Bhutanese and Burmese Nepalis do in the UK and the USA (Adhikari 2012; see also Chapter 13 in this volume).

The condition of integration in the home country certainly affects how and to what extent the earlier migrants can make their diasporic claims to the country which was their forefather's motherland. Fiji is the first country in Asia (South Pacific) to endorse ILO Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. The Fijian indigenous community has been enjoying privileged rights since 1874. The Fiji Indians have been struggling for about a century with some success for the establishment of equal citizenry rights. They also have been victims of the success of their own struggle, and entrepreneurial spirits, giving rise to reactionary military coups in 1987 and 2000 and to violent attacks against people and against property belonging to Fiji Indians (Prasad 2015; Trnka 2008). Mahendra Chaudhry was elected Prime Minister in 1999 and ousted the following year. The threat to

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safety posed by the coup led to an exodus of Fiji Indians to other countries. Due to a lack of political organization and their relatively small population, Fiji Nepalis have kept a low profile and were more or less unaffected during the times of highest tension. However, as subsistence peasants, they bore the brunt of the ensuing economic turmoil. A small number of Nepalis followed their Indian kin and migrated to other countries. Despite the declaration of the 2013 Constitution that all citizens of Fiji are equally Fijian, it is natural that Fiji Nepalis should feel insecure and wonder whether there might not be immediate disadvantages and few pragmatic benefits to be derived from building new diasporic associations with Nepal.

However, with globalization and new waves of migration, new possibilities open up. These random connections (such as with Gurkhas and recent NRNs) help feed and reinforce diasporic nostalgia through virtual and physical meetings and the availability of new information. The increasing presence of Nepalis in Australia and New Zealand enables increasing interaction between the old and new diaspora communities. Despite countercurrents in recent politics, nation-states are generally moving towards more liberal policies on citizenship, moving beyond the idea that a person can and should have one and only one country of allegiance. Fiji recognises multiple citizenships, and the NRNA has been successful in securing the inclusion of a Non-Resident Nepali Citizenship policy in Nepal's new constitution of 2015 (Chapter 18 below). As some third-generation Nepalis are still there in Fiji, in principle it is possible for them to become Non-Resident Nepali citizens.

Of the indenture experience, Brij V. Lal said, "Everyone is a 'coolie', huddled together on the estate lines in cramped quarters. In that sense, everyone is equal in the denial of their individual humanity. The indenture experience was a great leveller of hierarchy and status. I [also] see the indenture process as the death of one world and the beginning of another" (B.V. Lal 2012: 13). In light of this, it is perhaps an extraordinary testament to the persistence of culture and memory that Fiji Nepali identity has survived at all.

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PART II

THE NEW DIASPORA 1: TRANSNATIONAL URBAN MIGRANTS IN SINGAPORE, THE GULF, AND THE USA

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7

BELONGING AND NOT BELONGING

EXPERIENCES OF NEPALI GURKHA FAMILIES ON RETURNING FROM SINGAPORE

Kelvin E.Y. Low

THE GURKHAS, WHOSE HISTORY OF migration from Nepal to Southeast Asia and other regions dates back to the period of British colonialism, have established themselves in former British colonies that include Singapore, Hong Kong, and India (Nath 2009), as well as the UK itself. They were first recruited by the British Army in 1815 in the middle of the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814–16, as the British were impressed with their bravery and hardiness (Banskota 1994; Parker 1999). In certain contexts of military labour migration, they are allowed to bring their immediate families to settle down and receive education, while in others, Gurkhas who have retired have also gone into collaboration with private companies including those in Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. It is apparent that over the last two centuries, Gurkhas and their families have had a palpable global presence, working and residing not only in the countries for which they serve in the army (Britain, India, Brunei, Malaysia) or police force (Singapore), but also in other contexts where they have retired

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or embarked on a second career overseas in the private military and security industries (Bharadwaj 2003; Chakrabarti 2008; Davis 2000; Francis 1999; Uesugi 2007), cruise tourism (Jackman 2009; Wood 2002), and manual labour (Yamanaka 2000).

Their migrant life worlds and aspirations, however, have seldom been addressed in scholarly literature, with a few exceptions (for example, Bellamy 2011; Caplan 1995; Des Chene 1991, 1993). Other works based on Gurkha experiences include popular historical writings by British writers (or former British-Gurkha officers; see, for example, Bolt 1967; Bullock 2009; Smith 1973) and various other sources (Crew 2004; Cross and Gurung 2007; Karki 2009; Laksamba et al. 2013). In order to comprehend these global dispersions, and more pertinently, to query the migratory processes and their implications for both Gurkhas and their children, this chapter deals with notions of 'belonging' and 'not belonging'—terms that have been taken up in the scholarly literature in migration of late. Specific attention is paid to ex-Gurkhas who have retired from the Singapore Police Force and whose children were born and schooled in Singapore.[1] The chapter thus deliberates upon various migratory processes and experiences of Singapore Gurkha families in order to examine the transnationalization of Gurkha service against the backcloth of military historiography.

Formed in 1949, the Gurkha contingent in Singapore is one of the smallest in the world, where Nepali males between the ages of 17.5 and 21 are recruited in Nepal through the agency of the British Army (Gould 1999). It is estimated that there are about 2,000 Gurkhas at present serving in the Singapore Police Force (Chong 2014). Upon the retirement of their Gurkha fathers (usually in their forties), the children have to cease their education in Singapore and return to Nepal.

[1] The chapter forms part of an ongoing larger project where I analyse the migrant experiences of Gurkhas and their families through interviews, media reports, relevant websites and other internet sources, archival materials, and regimental histories. Thus far, over 50 ex-Gurkhas and their family members have been interviewed in English (with the exception of one retired Gurkha who is in his nineties, who spoke in Nepali). Upon consent granted from respondents, these interviews were voice-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

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What does having to curtail one's schooling years mean in terms of sentiments of attachment to place, social ties that have been established, and the process of returning 'home' to Nepal which at times feels more foreign than Singapore? By exiting Singapore not based on one's choice, how do the children adapt to life in Nepal and what are the available opportunities for education and employment as they undergo various socio-cultural adjustments (Conway and Potter 2009)? How do Gurkhas and their family members negotiate transnational interfaces (Long and Long 1992) in terms of their migrant experiences of work, belonging, and notions of 'home'? How are they positioned with regard to citizenship, belonging, rights, and privileges (Kabeer 2005; Kivisto and Faist 2007)? These adjustments therefore shore up the different meanings and attachments that conjoin belonging and the notion of 'home' for Gurkha families. Christou queries the polyvalent layers of 'home' and belonging:

> Home is as much fluid as it is rigid, it is flexible and complex. It seeks to ground and localise, but it is also an integral part of a world of movement, it is relative and contested, a site of ambivalence and a source of anxiety. Home as a concept that raises issues of belongingness can become complicated and difficult to deconstruct and even to contextualise and situate. It may trigger memories, trauma, indifference and evoke struggles over selfhood and nationhood. (Christou 2009: 112)

Following Christou, how do different members of Gurkha families relate to Nepal or Singapore as 'home'?[2]

I first deliberate on notions of belonging and not belonging. These notions are particularly helpful for framing narratives of ex-Gurkhas and their family members who have returned to Kathmandu and Pokhara to settle down after working for the Singapore Police Force (SPF) for at least fifteen years or more.[3] Then I analyse the politics of belonging in relation to organizational efforts put forward by two groups in Pokhara, namely the 'Everest Association' and the 'Annapurna Community'.[4] The chapter concludes by reflecting on

[2] Cf. Teerling (2011) and Teo (2011).

[3] The narrative interviews were conducted during a fieldtrip to Nepal in 2012.

[4] All names of informants and organizations are pseudonyms.

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how belonging and the politics of belonging, in the case of Gurkha families, demonstrate that Gurkha labour recruitment and migration are intertwined with emotive and affective belonging, as well as issues revolving around legal rights to citizenship and residence.

CONCEPTUALIZING 'BELONGING' AND 'NOT BELONGING'

Two central research queries guide the analytical thrust of this chapter: (1) What is belonging, and what is its character? and (2) What are the politics of belonging, and how do such politics shift over time, across and within generations, and through changing socio-political climates? The first question can be answered by understanding what belonging (and by extension, not belonging) means to individual Gurkha family members. The second, then, deals with what is at stake for those families, contextualized within the constraints and the freedoms that social actors exercise as they assess their own contexts of (not)-belonging. In short, I am interested in exploring what belonging looks and feels like personally (or at the individual and social group level), as well as what it means in political or structural terms (or at the collective level).[5]

The distinction between these two main queries corresponds with Yuval-Davis's (2006) differentiation of belonging and the politics of belonging. For her, the former refers to tangible dimensions of belonging that include emotional attachment and a sense of 'home' that one experiences. The latter has to do with how belonging is connected to collectives in particular ways, dovetailing discourses on nationalism, citizenship, and racism. Antonsich (2010) makes a very similar distinction between belonging as 'place-belongingness' and personal and intimate sentiments of feeling 'at home', and the 'politics of belonging' as a 'discursive resource' that is related to claims or resistance revolving inclusion and exclusion. His typology comprises five factors that elucidate belonging as felt and experienced:

5 This distinction is in line with the way Mee and Wright (2009) distinguish between the formal and informal aspects of belonging in relation to citizenship and civic identity.

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autobiographical, relational, cultural, economic, and legal. These five elements will provide the necessary trajectory for analysing my data, resembling what Yuval-Davis includes as "social locations; identifications and emotional attachments; and ethical and political values" (2006: 199).

Such discourses on belonging need to be framed within a set of specific historical and contemporary conditions (Teerling 2011) that confront Gurkhas and their families. For instance, one major difference between working for the British Army and the SPF is that while both British and Singapore Gurkhas take their families to live with them in their respective country of service, the latter are not allowed to remain in Singapore upon retirement, as compared to the former. Such conditions of employment and residence therefore influence and shape both sentiments and structures of belonging that conjoin the two interrelated queries outlined above.

There is another important point to be noted in the discussion to follow. While Gurkhas themselves are subject to contractual terms with the SPF which determine the length of their service, children of Gurkhas are by association affected by these terms. However, it is interesting to consider the experiences of Gurkha children in relation to 'return migration'—for which the term needs to be further interrogated as the children are, in a manner of speaking, not really 'returning' to Nepal since they were born and educated in Singapore. They are, as second-generation children, not migrants themselves (cf. Haikkola 2011); they are returning to *their parents'* birth country and not their own. This has consequences for the way they relate and adjust to living in Nepal, having spent almost two formative decades of their lives overseas as Singaporean-born Nepalis.[6] This is unlike their parents' biographies as natives of Nepal. Where they are concerned, the notion of 'return migration' is then more applicable for the first generation, that is, Gurkhas and their wives. Teerling's explanation concerning second-generation migrants and 'return' is useful here, "For the second generation, the term 'return'

[6] The official term used in Singapore and around the world, as at least one of my Gurkha children respondents knew, is NRN (Non-Resident Nepali) (see Chapter 18 in this volume).

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is ambiguous; it is not a return in terms of birthplace statistics, but rather an emigration to another country. Nevertheless, these migrants often do have a sentimental relationship with the parental homeland. Hence the 'return' has empirical meaning even if it breaches the logic of migration statistics" (Teerling 2011: 1080).

In this regard, what then is the significance of 'return' for both generations and how do they differ in terms of their capacities for engendering a sense of belonging or not belonging given their different linguistic, cultural, and national backgrounds? Overall, the notions of both belonging and not belonging require reflection on (i) distinguishing between senses of belonging and the politics of belonging; (ii) addressing the multiple levels of belonging which may be complementary or contradictory depending on context; and (iii) shifts in belonging over time. The third point on shifts warns us not to take belonging as a static and fixed category (Antonsich 2010), but rather to recall that social actors' senses of belonging acquire different meanings and saliences across the different periods of their lives. Besides, belonging and not belonging may not necessarily be mutually exclusive, as individuals may simultaneously subscribe to both in relation to Singapore and/or Nepal (cf. Cassarino 2004; Nath 2009).[7]

In order to explicate more clearly the shifts in belonging and not belonging, I will focus on the narrative accounts of Manisha, the 23-year-old daughter of a retired Gurkha who, at the time, had been in Nepal for four years following her father's retirement. The analysis will also be interspersed with the experiences of other Gurkhas and their children so as to establish the patterns of belonging and not belonging that may be identified. By attempting to account for discernible shifts that have arisen through my analyses of interview material, my assessment of the notion of belonging points towards its fluidity, thereby adding to conceptions of belonging as an on-going, multidimensional process, rather than as an unchanging, discrete status (Mee and Wright 2009; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011; Schein 2009; Teerling 2011; Teo 2011).

7 Cf. Ehrkamp and Leitner (2006), who raise the possibility of 'multiple allegiances' that traverse national borders and communities.

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BETWEEN BELONGING AND NOT BELONGING: SENTIMENTS AND POLITICS

Markers of belonging include the myriad knowledge and practices of everyday life that one acquires and sustains or recollects. This is concisely expressed by Yuval-Davis (2006: 199):

> People can 'belong' in many different ways and to many different objects of attachments. These can vary from a particular person to the whole of humanity, in a concrete or abstract way; belonging can be an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way. Even in its most stable 'primordial' forms, however, belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity, which is only a naturalised construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations.

In my conversations with ex-Gurkhas, their wives and children, narratives of belonging are replete with references to everyday practices and encounters which cover the range of informal and formal contexts of sociality. Food and foodways appear to be a salient and recurring index that connotes one's sense of belonging, given the familiarity and comfort that they provide. As Abdullah argues: "Food and the attendant sensory registers ... readily become quotidian expressions of multiple belongings and embodied connections social actors have with 'home'" (2010: 157). The fond recollections that informants articulate vis-à-vis gastronomy thereby reflect their sense of attachment and belonging to Singapore, as the following quotes depict:

> I think we all, even me, we are so deeply rooted to the sense that sometimes we just wake up, and then there's that, that smell of carrot cake, no I need to go to a hawker centre!
>
> I think there's like two of my friends there now. I think they also got married to someone in the Force, so now they are wives, the rest of us we are all here. So when we meet it's like eh Hokkien mee, and then roti prata ...

Gauri and Malashree, who were both born, bred, and schooled in Singapore, but then returned to Kathmandu, told me that whenever they missed Singapore food, they would troop down to a restaurant in Kathmandu known as 'Sing-ma Foodcourt', an eatery opened by a Singaporean who serves both Singaporean and Malaysian cuisine

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including nasi lemak, chicken rice, and beef rendang.[8] Missing Singapore *and* Nepali food thus appears to be part of the processes of migration and return migration in the context of transnationalism. Manisha relates how her aunt first felt homesick about having to leave Nepal. Later on, the same feelings became apparent for Singapore food when her aunt returned to Nepal on holiday during her Gurkha-husband's leave. Manisha relates her aunt's experience as follows:

> I can't wait to go back to Singapore, when I first was a newly-wed I went to Singapore, I was so homesick I missed all my family and all the Nepali food back home. Now I stay in Singapore, I can't wait to have chicken rice and all the hokkien mee ... I'm so sick already, I can't wait to go [back] to Singapore, I don't know about the kids but I need to be back in Singapore already.

According to Manisha, then, she believes that her aunt "has a sense of belonging to Singapore, and all the food there". Such everyday practices as eating reflect "the process of incorporating the 'nation' into everyday life" (Christou 2009: 109). That is to say, the yearning for Singaporean cuisine represents returnees' subjective identification with the country, mediated through food and food practices as part of everyday senses of belonging. Recreating memories of Singapore through gastronomy would thereby mirror Antonsich's (2010: 647) take on autobiographical factors relating to one's past as a component of 'place-belongingness'.

Lalita, who is the wife of a retired Gurkha Chief Inspector, told me that she maintains an account with a local bank in Singapore so that they can easily withdraw local currency whenever in Singapore. Furthermore, Lalita proudly declared: "Singapore is my country". Similarly, Hiresh, who retired from the SPF in 2005 after 27 years of service, receives his pension from the Singapore government through a Singapore bank account. Beyond the practicality of having monthly amounts transferred into this account, he remarks: "... even though [I'm] retired, my heart is still there [Singapore]". He tells me that he continues to keep abreast with news on Singapore, making the reading of blogs and other websites for 3 to 4 hours a day as part of his daily routine.

8 See www.singmafoodcourt.com. Accessed on 7 June 2012.

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These instances of recounting what Gurkha families miss about Singapore, and what they still retain in/of Singapore, represent senses of meaningful belonging, which, according to Kendall, Woodward, and Skrbis (2009: 33; original emphasis) are not "reducible to human-focused social interaction but ... can be derived from relationships with *places*, *objects* and *ideas*." The various material and non-material aspects of how life in Singapore is reconstructed assume emotional valence for informants. These aspects are significant as they provide a sense of connection to Singapore. They parallel what Hedetoft (2004: 24) calls the "sources of belonging" that include "familiarity, sensual experience, human interaction and local knowledge" which are rooted in place. Together, these elements form the "sources of homeness" (Hedetoft 2004: 24).

To be a student in Singapore is to recite the national pledge and to sing the national anthem on a daily basis. To be a Nepali studying in Singapore is likewise to both sing and recite what Singaporean students do. Gauri, for example, claims that she feels more Singaporean than Nepali, given that reciting the pledge and singing the national anthem has become her daily routine during her school years in Singapore. In fact, she shared that she thought she was Singaporean till she had to return to Nepal at the age of twenty-three. In this respect, her sense of 'Singaporeanness' thereby acts as a foil to the lack of knowledge or affective ties to Nepal, a point that Manisha reflected similarly:

> You know I was just thinking about it this morning, what are the significant dates in Nepal–in Singapore it was always 9th August, you know? National day is coming! And then there's the Padang, and everything, and then here [Nepal] I don't know anything. I know nuts, you know. It was so funny because I was thinking of ... I think this morning or the morning before, yah, so in a way that just shows like how Singaporean we really are. But yah, like I said, it's slowly coming to terms with acceptance, yah.

While Gurkha children do feel that Singapore is 'home' for them, such sentiments of belonging cannot be translated into legislative and political terms, as Singapore is still the host society in which they grew up and spent their formative years as non-citizens. I visited a former Gurkha chief inspector of the SPF in Pokhara, where I spoke with his wife and daughter as well, about their experiences and memories of having lived and studied in Singapore. When asked about citizenship,

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the Inspector's wife went into the house (we were chatting over tea on the verandah) and subsequently brought out her daughter's birth certificate to show me. It was a certificate issued by a Singapore hospital which explicitly states that 'the child is not a citizen of Singapore at the time of birth'.[9] By virtue of showing me the birth certificate that clearly and officially marks her daughter as a non-citizen, the Inspector's wife indicated that belonging to Singapore was not possible in legislative terms.

Thus far, the various examples both demonstrate feelings of belonging and otherwise. The ease and familiarity with which membership to Singapore society and everyday practices are experienced and recounted suggest that there is a felt sense of belonging to the country in which they were born and bred, which is not Nepal. These senses of belonging should not merely be read as 'cognitive stories' (Yuval-Davis 2006: 202). They instead stand for emotional connections and desires for attachment, expressing both individual longings and collective social interactions or initiatives in their migrant biographies.

Some of the Gurkha children in Kathmandu meet occasionally under the auspices of what they have termed the 'Merlion Club', a reference to Singapore's iconic tourist symbol of a half-fish/half-lion mythical figure. Such attachments relate to what Mee and Wright (2009: 772) term as the "affective aspects of belonging". Through the Merlion Club, as well as other gatherings, a sense of belonging is bolstered through different affiliative configurations that add to identity formation as collectives (cf. Fortier 1999). Gurkha wives told me that they often get together to reminisce about their time in Singapore; comparisons are made between their country of origin (Nepal) and the host country (Singapore). These examples would also exemplify what Brubaker (2010: 65) terms as "everyday membership practices of identification and categorization".

ON NOT BELONGING

Gurkha children are connected both to their birthplace (Singapore) and their place of 'origin' (Nepal). The word 'origin' needs to be clarified.

9 One vital component of belonging, Antonsich (2010) argues, comprises legal factors such as citizenship or residence permits.

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Gurkha children are, by virtue of their parents' nationality, Nepali. Hence, even if they were not born in Nepal, it is because of their parents that Nepal has to be their place of origin or their ancestral homeland. This then accounts for how Manisha's father constantly reminded Manisha and her siblings that they cannot assimilate too much into Singapore society since the eventual locale of settlement would be Nepal and not Singapore. The sense of belonging that Gurkhas instil in their children links them to their country of 'origin'. As she recounted how her father constantly reminded them:

> I don't know about my friends' fathers, but my father would say like, he'll be the one ... he's a man of a few words, he will be the one to say like, erm yes, be grateful that you have a chance to grow up as a Singaporean, and it's taken somewhat like a social experiment, you know, you are Nepali but you get the whole Singapore experience, from birth all the way up, but never forget that actually you are Nepali, so in in trying to blend in here [Singapore], do keep a note at the back of your mind, that at one time you have to leave ... yah, so while blending in, like remember or be careful not to blend too completely to the extent that it becomes a weakness somewhat.

As a corollary, the idea of 'origin' requires further examination, as it takes on different nuances for the first and second generation of Nepalese who worked, studied, or assumed household duties in Singapore. Manisha conveys what her mother thought of having left Nepal after getting married, and having to return upon her husband's retirement. She describes:

> And then I think more than for us she was speaking for herself and the other wives, so, I mean, we stayed there for a good eighteen, twenty years, and then like now we're here [Nepal], it's a very pathetic state for us because for us we're neither here nor there ... so where do we pick up from, you know, where do we pick up and where did we really leave, leave Singapore or leave Nepal?

For the children of Gurkhas, and in the case of Manisha's mother, there is therefore a sense of displacement (Yuval-Davis 2006) in Nepal (where belonging is meant to naturally arise), as a consequence of having spent many years in Singapore.

Manisha returned to Nepal after she had completed her 'O' levels in Singapore. Her recollection of first impressions of her return tells

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how little she felt she belonged. This sense of distance arose from having been brought up in Singapore. Such exposure instilled mores and social norms that Manisha found lacking in Nepal.

> So when I was taking the taxi ride back home [from the airport in Kathmandu], as offerings we got like Mandarin oranges ... and then we were having the oranges in the taxi, and then you know how Singapore is like, you know, it's a 'fine' city, you don't litter, and then, er, like you always keep your litter in a plastic bag or in your pockets, so I was eating the Mandarin oranges, the peels were on my hands, on my lap, and then I'm looking at my aunt, looking at the scenery, I'm like, "'where's the dustbin?" and my aunt points out of the window, and [says] "That's the dustbin". She pointed to the ground [outside of the taxi]. So I'm like, "No, I mean the dustbin", I'm still looking for the dustbin, and then later I comprehend that the dustbin was the open road, and then she just takes the peel from my hand, then she tossed it out the window [while the taxi was still moving]. And until I get home I was still trying to digest like did that really happen? In front of my bare eyes? Or I am just, that was some crazy dream or something? Because I have never done that in my whole life.

Ostensibly, Manisha faces different cultural frameworks (Wilding 2007) in her experience of 'return' migration, where the materialities of everyday life in the two countries to which she is connected are markedly dissimilar. On top of the orange peel incident, the following 'phlegm' experience also remains etched in Manisha's memory and highlights the distinction between Singapore and Nepal:

> Even when it comes to like ... er ... dispelling phlegm, we are always taught to spit into our tissue paper, excuse ourselves to the washroom, and here [in Nepal] people just do it in the open. And I was like, hmm, I'm gonna hold it, I'm gonna go home and then I'd gonna like, yah, then go the toilet, and then I talk. Then my aunt was like, "why are you so quiet, why are you so quiet?" She was elbowing me, but then I was pointing to my mouth, she said, "Just spit it out the window!" It was a second shock in the taxi ride, so already ... it was really an eye-opener, I couldn't I don't think I could get a shocking, more realistic eye-opener than a taxi ride to home [Nepal] ... yah ... [the basic everyday things] that I never in my wildest imagination thought would happen in Nepal. There it was, in front of my eyes.

Having to relocate to Nepal because of her father's retirement from the SPF, Manisha's process of relocation may be regarded as a 'project

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of the self' which include both difficulties and successes that operate in tandem as one relocates to one's homeland (Christou 2009: 110).

From the initial stages of adjusting to life in Nepal, to four years later where she is presently working as a hotel guest relations officer in Kathmandu, Manisha has gone through *shifts* in sentiments of belonging where she has gradually become used to life in Nepal. For instance, she recounts the story of a Nepali friend who was brought up in India, who later came back to Nepal as a young child. Although Manisha says she does not regard this friend as a 'true Nepali', she acknowledges that this friend is "more Nepali than me (Manisha) because of the years that she's here". However, her friend thinks otherwise, as Manisha herself explains:

> And yet she says to me that "I'm amazed by the way you've settled in, because when I look at you I feel like you are now the local and I'm the tourist." So I take it as a positive feedback that I've really put myself out here, and challenged myself to fit in, and learn erm ... erm learn not by the book but by observation and everything that happens around me, and I haven't just challenged myself, I've succeeded actually. Yah, so ... initially the challenges are there but then it's up to the individual, whether to succeed and just stick it in, or still deny that you are Nepali and still speak Singlish and you know just brag whatever thing Singaporean. Because that's sort of an illusion. You are not really holding that red [Singaporean] passport, you have a green passport and you are here [in Nepal].[10]

In Manisha's own evaluation of returning to Nepal, she realizes and embraces the challenges that she had to overcome. On the basis of her friend's opinion, among other factors, she arrives at the conclusion that she has in fact managed well in (re)incorporating into Nepali society. Such an admission is then rounded off by way of referring to belonging in official and legislative dimensions, where Manisha raises the bureaucratic distinction between passports that connote the different nationalities in this context. Having said that, one should note, in subscribing to Brubaker's (2010: 64) contention, that the

[10] Singlish refers to a mixture of local languages and dialects that is spoken in Singapore. The red passport and green passport that Manisha points to, refer to the passports of Singapore and Nepal, respectively.

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politics of citizenship and of belonging "can be distinguished analytically". In spite of the connotations of '*formal* state membership' that is granted vis-à-vis citizenship, social actors can still possess a sense of belonging to more than one country, as Manisha's biography suggests. While there is no formal belonging to the Singapore state given that she is not in possession of the red passport, Manisha's narrative nonetheless reflects the presence of substantive or felt membership in Singapore.

Simultaneous senses of belonging to both Singapore and Nepal may be discerned from Manisha's account of reminiscing about the 'good days' that she and her cousin experienced in Singapore:

> You know, like, "Oh you know Singapore won a gold medal in the Olympics, or you know, National day is coming, and did you check the photographs on Facebook and what they are doing different this year ..." Yah so it's ... yah so for me, it's sort of like, I think I'm trying ... I'm becoming more Nepali, and then just when I feel like yah, I'm working there, I mean I don't force myself to work there, but I see it happening. Then something happens that brings me back to Singapore. So it's just I think another loud statement that yah I can't deny that it will always be a part of me. It will have a ... permanent space in my heart. Yes.

Concurrent sentiments of belonging to both countries, in the above account, are represented through Manisha's subscription to the Singapore community and its success or celebrations with regard to international sports performance or national day as a mark of the nation's independence.[11] Manisha's account also indicates a shift in belonging, as she feels that she is 'becoming more Nepali', and yet acknowledges at the same time that Singapore will hold a 'permanent space' in her heart: belonging to one country slowly becomes belonging to two. In other words, sentiments of belonging and not belonging—and indeed multiple belonging—ought to be perceived as sharing the same plane on a continuum instead of being a dichotomous polarity.

[11] This sense of belonging resonates with Anderson's (1983) notion of imagined communities, which takes on the added dimension of a felt sense of membership within Singapore society as Gurkha children themselves imagine.

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THE POLITICS OF BELONGING: WHAT IS AT STAKE?

The politics of belonging may be examined in two ways: the first, how claims to belonging are rationalized, leads to the second: the ways Gurkha families wish to assert the rights that arise from those claims. Overall, there are benefits and costs of (not) belonging to different constellations, representing the valuing and judging of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006). These may pertain to economic and medical entitlements, as well as community development in the country of settlement. In other words, when belongingness is created, claims to belonging can then be formulated and put forward, in this case, to the Singapore government. As such, belonging becomes a resource (Antonsich 2010) that can be mobilized whereby social actors assert the right to stay, or to work in a place (Ervine 2008), among other claims.

The chairmen of the Everest Association and the Annapurna Community have organized themselves as a collective. It was agreed that the Everest Association would press claims in Singapore and the Annapurna Community would concentrate on contributing to the Nepali community in their post-retirement years. In my meeting with Hiresh, he enumerated seven requests to the Singapore government through the SPF, which demonstrate what is at stake if and when claims (built upon belonging) are successfully pursued. They were as follows:[12]

1. A review of retired servicemen's pensions, given that the inflation rate [in Nepal] has not been taken into account.
2. An increase of allowance for current servicemen.
3. Review of existing partial medical coverage that can only be reimbursed in Singapore; different medical coverage for servicemen who retired before and after 1994.
4. Permanent residency [in Singapore] for Gurkha children.
5. Wives and children to be allowed to work in Singapore.
6. Re-employment opportunities for retired servicemen.
7. Gurkha widows' pension.

[12] These requests were made to the SPF in recent years but have not met with any success so far.

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The above requests were put forward by the Everest Association, crafted on the basis of rights of belonging that thereby engender these claims. As Hiresh put it:

> So, erm ... once our group retired in 2004, we think, there is no harm requesting to the government. ... because we are requesting ... if we don't request ... we spent half our lives there, we serve, surviving with the pension given by the Singapore government, where [can] we go [to request]? We are not serving the government of Nepal, we were serving [Singapore] so we should request. I think morally, that should not be any problem. Yah. We should request. Yah.

The rationale for requesting is contingent on having served Singapore, and not the government of Nepal, which therefore prompted Hiresh and his group of ex-Gurkhas with the right to claim based on moral grounds of service and sacrifice. Hiresh cited the example of an ex-Gurkha who, having retired in 1962, continued to receive S$62 (£31) as his pension. The response to this request from the Singapore Police Headquarters was that every retired serviceman who had served in Singapore could, from 2005, receive no more than S$218 (£110) per month.

Further claims to permanent residency for their children were also raised, given that they were born and bred in Singapore, and that they would therefore not be able to fit in, in Nepal:[13]

> We also request with the government that ... children who were born there, they be given PR [permanent residency], because they are born [there], they are brought up there! They studied there, and er ... they come here [Nepal], they are treated by Nepalese government like alien. Because they don't know any rule ... they don't know any rule, they don't know Nepali, they don't know the system here, here you have a lot of under the table things you know? They don't know, they are very straight, they are like Singaporean.

Following the rationale that these children would know and therefore could survive and adapt in Singapore society, Hiresh reiterated such

[13] This may be interpreted as an instrumental move in order to legitimize PR claims, given that the Gurkha children whom I discuss in this chapter have largely learnt to adapt in Nepal, though not without difficulties in their adjustments.

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adaptability by arguing that they were brought up the 'Singaporean way'. This meant to him that the children deserved the right to remain: "I think, for them, surviving in Singapore, they are qualified also. They studied there, they adapted there, so ... we requested, if they are given, and then, it will be much more better" (sic).

Having a PR status would then mean that the children could continue to pursue their education and eventually work in Singapore, despite their Gurkha fathers' retirement and mandatory return to Nepal. Hiresh elaborated further as to why PR status ought to be awarded to the children, in part due to their families' ability to finance their education costs:

> The other thing is, one thing is, once the father retires, whole family have to retire you know? We are repatriated. Can't stay on. Problem. That is a difficult fact. Children don't want to come [to Nepal]. Children want to stay there, want to study there! Also cannot! Not given the opportunity. The amazing thing is, if the people want to go for tertiary education, or somebody want to go further studies, in Singapore, er ... they also have money, and they are given the opportunity. But the children of the Gurkhas, they have CPF, they have gratuity everything, so they can support their [children's education], because why? Every parent want to support their children. For their education, yah. Even though they have CPF, they have gratuity, they ... money accumulated for the children, they want to give them also, it's not given the opportunity you know. That's the ... erm ... very sad ... and very ... disappointing fact. So ... we raised this point also.[14]

Similar stances were also adopted by other retired Gurkha servicemen who claimed it was puzzling and frustrating that, in spite of their children having been schooled and trained as nurses in Singapore, they were not allowed to work as nurses thereafter. Furthermore, these servicemen also pointed out that there are many foreigners in Singapore working mainly as nurses in the medical industry, and who come from such countries as China, the Philippines, and India. One ex-Gurkha noted that some nurses from China could not speak

[14] CPF stands for Central Provident Fund, where it is mandatory for every Singaporean who works to contribute a portion of their monthly salary to the fund as their individual retirement fund. The same terms and conditions apply to Gurkhas working in the SPF as well.

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English: "But they can't even speak English. We can speak English but [are] not allowed to work in Singapore." Hiresh's frustration is discernible here:

> Singapore employing the nurses from Philippines, from China, and India as well. But the Gurkhas' children, study there, and born there, brought up there, and did the nursing course there! Staff nurse course. But not allowed to work. Yah ... so they migrated to elsewhere. Some erm ... er ... Australia, some in United Kingdom, some in the States. Since their degree is accepted in those countries, why not in Singapore? This is the problem. Because the children are penalized because the father is Gurkha. Very sad case.

Beyond the impossibility of working in Singapore, Hiresh's extract raises another point in the cycles or processes of migration that are associated with not belonging in this instance. That is to say, Gurkha children who have earned the relevant qualifications are not permitted to put their skills to good use in the Singapore medical field, and yet return migration to Nepal is not a desirable option for these children. According to Hiresh, they are regarded as 'aliens' in Nepal. Migrating to other countries outside of Asia for further studies or work then becomes another option in their migratory journeys. In sum, the politics of belonging, documented through the foregoing discussion, is connected to citizenship and its rights and duties, including "the right to migrate, the right of abode, the right to work and, more and more recently, the right to plan a future where you live" (Yuval-Davis 2006: 208). This sentiment has been echoed by both former Gurkhas and their children who worked and studied in Singapore. What is at stake in the politics of belonging—where belonging translates into a resource as discussed earlier—has to do with securing both educational and economic stability.

In order to expand upon the varying registers of belonging across different generations, and what is at stake, I draw attention to the seventh requested item that has to do with establishing a widows' pension. Hiresh mentioned that in comparison to the widows' pension that is made available for the wives of deceased Gurkhas in the British and the Indian armies, there is no similar scheme in the case of Singapore. He then explains why such a pension is important:

> Of course we understand that there's no pension for Singaporean also. Yah, we understand. But, the Singaporean widow have (sic) much more

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> advantage. They can work. The Gurkha wives, they remain as dependents. Whole ... whole ... time, all the way, the husband works there. Can't work. And erm ... the time when she can work, time has gone you know! By the time the husband reaches the 45, 45 years, then it's too late. She come back here (Nepal), she has nothing. So that's why, er ... we requested the government that the, at least, er ... yah, that's why we have a, one widows' fund. We created our own.

Asking for the widows' pension therefore connects to the other request on allowing Gurkha wives to seek employment in Singapore, through which they can then be economically self-sufficient should their spouses pass on.

While waiting for this request to be considered, the Everest Association has, on its own, initiated a widows' pension. Active servicemen contribute S$10 (£5) per month to this cause. Hiresh cited a case of one Gurkha policeman who was in Chitwan on leave from service in Singapore, and who met with a tragic accident when the boat he was in capsized. His wife and children had to return to Nepal and had no form of support; the widows' fund was subsequently established as a way to help such widows cope with the loss of their only source of income. In this respect, belonging is counter-posed to economic dispossession (Stratford 2009) in the recommendation for a pension scheme for Gurkha widows. In other words, belonging here is transformed into a resource for these widows to obtain economic stability as a 'right' to be exercised.

The other dimension of belonging, politics, and what is at stake, has to do with Gurkha initiatives relating to community-building efforts. At the same time, pursuing these endeavours with the larger good of the community in mind would thereby enhance the visibility of ex-Gurkhas in Pokhara.[15] Where earlier deliberations on politics of belonging and citizenship dealt with claims to rights, the following discussion on such politics is related to the notion of 'cultural citizenship' which has to do with community activism as the main signifier

[15] In this example on Pokhara, I am moving beyond the case of Singapore Gurkhas to consider Gurkhas more generally. Note that where Singapore Gurkhas do not possess the right of settlement, the opposite is true for British and Indian Gurkhas. Such a difference would mean that the politics of belonging applies in varying degrees in each case.

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of belonging and membership (Pawley 2008; Yuval-Davis 2006). To begin with, Banskota notes that,

> ... the British Gurkha soldiers became the first common people to get mass education in the country. They were also the first source of public contact with the outside world. They visited different countries ... and worked side by side with nationals of different countries. This gave them an opportunity to familiarise themselves with new and progressive ideas abroad with which they compared what they found at home. On their return home from abroad they became the vehicle for spreading among their families, friends and communities the importance of education and development. Thus, indirectly the British Gurkha soldiers were instrumental for enlightening the masses about the political, social, economic and education reconstruction of their nation ... the Gurkhas were the first among the common people who became conscious of their rights and duties and tried to bring changes in their country. (Banskota 1994: 166–7)

Through the auspices of the Annapurna Community, four 'institutes'[16] have been established since 2009 in an attempt to contribute to community building. They include (1) a cooperative (savings and credit) only for Gurkhas and their families; (2) a grocery shop that caters to the general public; (3) a Gurkhali Radio Station; and (4) a joint-venture jewellery shop. The chair of the Community, Lagan, states that, "This [is] our country, [we] take the challenge, try to do something. ... We are doing every bit to attract and unite our people ... to highlight our people's activities. ... We make our identity here [in Pokhara] ... not only [as] brave fighters ... we can prove that we have other ways to contribute to this country."

Having served with the British Army for over twenty years, and having travelled to many places including Brunei and Singapore, Lagan reasons that instead of "keeping the West with me ... [I'd] rather expose [Nepal] to all these kind of things". With an interest in harnessing the varied experiences that he had accumulated over the course of two decades of serving in the British Army, the four institutes are a way of fostering community bonds through self-help services. Gurkhas and retired servicemen may be shareholders of these institutes, regardless of whether they are/were working with

16 The term 'institute' was employed by the chairman, Lagan.

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the British Army or the SPF. Gurkhas serving in the UK, residing in Kathmandu, in Singapore, whether they are in active service or otherwise, all contribute to these four organizations. Their contributions indicate the diasporic outreach and inflow of financial assistance or investment into Nepal, or what Seddon et al. (2002: 34) might term the "(unrecognised) remittance economy". This would also relate to Yamanaka's (2000) contention that as a result of the tradition of British Gurkha army service (to which I add Gurkha Singapore Police service), a remittance economy in Nepal has been created in both rural and urban areas. Interestingly, Lagan delineated four categories of Gurkhas who have retired from active service. The four types of retired servicemen are, in his words, as follows:

1. "I had enough ... I have pension ... and want to do nothing."
2. "They go for [a] second career." (Usually in the security industry.)
3. "They ... enjoy drinking, playing cards, gambling ... womanizing ..."
4. "[They get] involved with community and social work."

Ostensibly, Lagan, together with ex-Gurkhas who form individual working committees of each of the four institutes, belong to the fourth category of retired Gurkhas or what Cassarino (2004: 270) would call 'actors of change'. Lagan explains why he decided to return to Nepal to settle down, despite a recent ruling in the UK which awarded ex-Gurkhas the right to remain in Britain:

> Having served ... so many years outside the country, where er ... I think every single person, wish to ... die ... do something for everyone. So, my ... resettlement, right to remain in the UK, I prefer myself not to go because you already spent so many years outside of your country, serve for others, so I decided myself to do something for the community, for the people, who need our help. ... I learned something, I gained a lot of experience ... so I decided to get involved in community, social service work.

Across the four 'institutes' that have been established in the last few years, Lagan details the number of shareholders per institute, where he also mentions the amount that each shareholder has to invest. For example, there are about 278 shareholders for the cooperative, and approximately 128 who have invested in the grocery shop, with amounts ranging between Rs 25,000 and Rs 500,000 (approximately

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£180 to £3640). The minimum share for investing in the radio station, Lagan says, is Rs 10,000 (or £73). Apart from disseminating local, regional, and international news, Gurkhali Radio 106 MHZ also broadcasts a weekly, one-hour programme hosted by Lagan himself (Figure 7.1). He interviews ex-Gurkhas about their individual experiences of serving overseas. As for the jewellery shop (Figure 7.2), he says that Gurkha families would go there to purchase accessories for weddings and other special occasions, where they would receive a discount given their Gurkha background.

The four institutes that Lagan oversees represent a cultivated sense of belonging to Nepal or Pokhara as a way of contributing

Figure 7.1 Gurkhali Radio Station, Pokhara.

Source: K. Low (2012).

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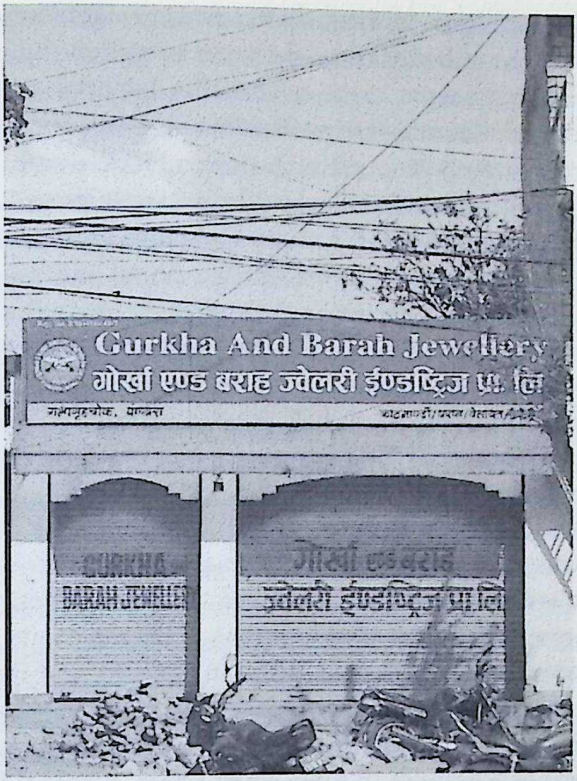

Figure 7.2 Gurkha and Barah Jewellery Store, Pokhara.

Source: K. Low (2012).

to the community. These institutes represent a way for Lagan to articulate and further foster his belonging to Nepal, and specifically to Pokhara, by providing services and opportunities to fellow ex-Gurkhas. However, Lagan also points out that such contributions only involve Gurkhas and their families, and not non-Gurkha locals (in terms of investments). With an intention to transcend the image of Gurkhas as brave and loyal (and not good at business), and therefore to demonstrate that they can make contributions to the country, Lagan is however of the opinion that locals cannot be trusted. He therefore manages the four institutes for the Gurkha community exclusively. This then raises an interesting point with regard to the issue of belonging that is constructed on the basis of community

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services. Belonging as performed after return migration means the re-establishment of boundaries when one is back in the homeland. While belonging seems to be a desirable intention after having served a foreign country for two decades or more, such belonging in Nepal concurrently produces exclusionary mechanisms. As we see in Lagan's case, exclusion of those *not* belonging to these Gurkha initiatives takes place as well. One might argue that, as return migrants, they have also changed in terms of the cultural and social frameworks that they have been exposed to and subsequently subscribed to, which thereby leads to the distinction between migrants and non-migrants in the context of Nepal.

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In my attempts to evaluate what belonging means, as well as the accompanying stakes that come into play in relation to (not)-belonging, I have argued that belonging first needs to be empirically realized so as to draw attention to what it means to belong or not belong to a particular country. From the Gurkha to his wife, and his children who were born in Singapore, the idea of 'origin' and therefore 'return migration' take on perceptible differences given the contrasting biographical backgrounds of these social actors. Where the Gurkhas and their wives have left Nepal for Singapore, their children, as Singapore-born Nepalis, have not experienced the same type of departure. Instead, their departure from Singapore may very well connote this country as 'origin'; having to 'return' to Nepal, at first, makes no sense. Cassarino (2004: 268) is right when he contends that, instead of comprehending 'return' as marking the end of the migration cycle, it must be seen as one of many stages in the migratory process. Given the problematization of 'return' as a process and not as an end point in the larger scheme of migration, it remains to be seen whether senses of belonging and not belonging may take on different permutations for retired Gurkhas and their families in varying host-origin contexts.

Second, belonging and not belonging should not be treated in a dichotomous manner. Through the narratives that I have presented above, it is clear that belonging and not belonging may take place concurrently, given the simultaneous subscription to felt senses of familiarity, comfort, and longing for both Nepal and Singapore that

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thread across different phases of informants' lives. Third, belonging also shifts in meaning and through context. Having a stake in a country means asserting one's rights, such as the claims that have been put forward by Gurkha families with regard to education, medical, and employment entitlements in or from Singapore. Returning to Nepal also means organizing Gurkha families as a collective, so as to deliver community-based initiatives, as Nepal is also their country of belonging in their retirement milieu.

The final point to note is that while much scholarship has made conceptual distinctions between belonging, identity, citizenship, and other cognate notions within the wider discussion on migration, it is also pertinent to acknowledge that these imbricated categories of experience, be they experienced at the level of the everyday, or at the structural sociolegal levels, need to be addressed concurrently so as to provide a fuller, and both empirical and categorical, means of unpacking what belonging, not belonging, and the politics of belonging connote for different generations of migrants. As I have suggested, belonging and not belonging are not to be regarded as occupying two opposite ends of a dichotomy but rather as different points along a continuum. It is therefore crucial to realize why and how migrants of different generations occupy varying points on this continuum, and how best conceptual notions of (not)-belonging can account for the heterogeneity of experiences. Indeed, and while I concur with Brubaker (2010: 76) that questions of migration, membership, and belonging are "as old as human history", it is nonetheless paramount to re-examine these notions with regard to the multifaceted makeup of diasporic populations contingent upon the varying cycles, generations, and types of migrant trajectories that together animate cross-border and cross-cultural encounters within specific sociocultural and political structural milieus.

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8

POPULAR MUSIC AMONG NEPALIS IN BAHRAIN

NIGHTCLUBS, MEDIA, PERFORMANCE, AND PUBLICS

Anna Stirr

IN A NEPALI NIGHTCLUB IN Bahrain, while performers are preparing for the night's programme, I stop to talk to two regular customers, both Nepali.[1] Aware that I am researching music, they are eager to tell me about how important it is in their lives. Both drivers, they tell me about how, since they have been abroad, they have started listening

[1] Research for this article was conducted with the support of a Mellon Career Development Fellowship in Ethnomusicology at Oxford University, UK. I would like to thank everyone I met in Bahrain for sharing their world with me, as well as Ram Kumar Singh for the professional and family connections that made it possible for me to go to Bahrain as a performer, Tyler Bickford for sharing his work on karaoke, Martin Stokes and Andrew Gardner for inspiring discussions, and C.K. Lal and Michael Hutt for comments on an earlier draft.

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to more Nepali popular music and singing in the nightclubs, either with the karaoke machine or with the band. They have even developed aspirations to become singers themselves, and record albums upon returning to Nepal. Music, says one of the drivers, is "our main friend now".

Nepali popular music is truly important in the lives of Nepali people working in the Gulf states. In a place where public life is highly circumscribed, music is one way of asserting both presence and group solidarity. One way Nepalis in the Gulf experience affective connection and assert their public existence as a community is through practices of popular music listening and performance. These may include playing recordings in the car, on one's phone, in one's own private space, attending Nepali events where music is performed, performing at such events, performing as a job in a Nepali nightclub, and attending a nightclub either to perform as a customer, or to sit and listen. Nepali cassettes and VCDs, and more recently, digitally distributed songs, do a brisk business on the formal and informal markets in the Gulf States. According to the owners of the only Nepali music shop in Manama, Bahrain, the highest-selling genres of Nepali music are those that have folk music elements: *lok git*, *lok dohori*, and *lok pop*. As of 2012, there were Nepali nightclubs in Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, and in Bahrain's major city, Manama—the three primary Gulf cities in which nightclubs are permitted. The ones in Abu Dhabi and Dubai remain in operation, but those in Manama closed in 2014.[2] In addition, throughout the Gulf States, Nepali organizations put on concert programmes at Nepali holidays, with performers drawn from the local Nepali communities, as well as big-name artists invited from Nepal.

In terms of the performance of symbolic 'Nepaliness' in the nightclubs, what goes on in Bahrain is not too different from what goes on in Nepal's dohori restaurants. The primary difference is that while in

[2] In the summer of 2014 the Bahraini government cracked down on three-star hotels with live music, forcing those that were in violation of various regulations to cease operation. Both the hotels housing the Nepali bands fell into this category. Later in 2014, the Bahraini government banned the sale of alcohol in three-star hotels and the Nepali clubs chose not to reopen.

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Nepali dohori restaurants, patrons dance to the music, in Bahrain, patrons' dancing is banned. Also, a much wider range of genres are performed in Bahrain, as performers cater to a wider range of customers of various nationalities. Bahrain is host to a mixed population of Nepalis, including many with rural backgrounds whose varied tastes in Nepali music intersect in the styles that have been most prominently promoted as 'national folk': *lok git*, *lok dohori*, *lok pop*, and *lok adhunik*.[3] The Nepal represented in much of this music and its corresponding videos is that of the central-western hills, and the songs are in the Nepali language. The reason for this narrow regional representation is rooted in the development of Nepal's music industry in dialogue with Panchayat-era ideas of unitary national culture and the associations of this area of the country with national identity that were promoted at that time (see Stirr 2017). Although this association of music from the central-western hills with Nepali national identity has been increasingly contested through the development of indigenous-language and regional recording industries (Stirr 2012), this music still remains associated with an easily recognized version of national feeling. This version of national feeling is based on universalized tropes of rural village homes, symbolized by the musical features and common topics of songs in the *lok* family of genres. It draws on nationalist rhetoric that roots the nation in the rural hills. Like country music in the United States, which often roots the nation in the rural South, this indexical association of rurality and region with nation is recognizable even to those who do not like the music or have never experienced rural village life. Broadly, even if individuals cannot identify with the specific village setting described in a song, or the regional source of the melodies used, the established associations of these musical and lyrical tropes may still invoke this idealized version of Nepal.[4] This chapter explores the relationship between migrants'

3 As with all genres, the referent of each of these genre names is fluid and contested, and may be different within different contexts. I use all of these terms as they are used in Nepal's commercial music industry.

4 I am not arguing that all Nepalis like or identify with this music but that its set of associations with an idealized version of the nation are recognizable to most Nepalis. This chapter is about those who *do* end up identifying with

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situation and the importance of this music in their lives, with a focus on performers and customers at two Nepali nightclubs in Manama.

INTIMATE PUBLICS, POPULAR MUSIC, AND PERFORMANCE

As Nepalis in Nepal imagine what it must be like in *bidesh*, or foreign lands, so too do Nepalis abroad imagine their homeland in particular ways, and this exchange of imaginaries is part of what drives the transnational Nepali music industry. These social practices of imagination and their related affective registers cohere in what Lauren Berlant has called an intimate public. Berlant defines intimate publics as made up of people loosely united by a sense that there is a common emotional world available to those individuals who share kinds of suffering they can imagine as similar. Intimate publics are intimate because they articulate such solidarity outside of the political realm; specifically, outside of the realms of rights-based or similar claims for recognition and redress on institutional bodies (Berlant 2008: 10).

Berlant insists that intimate publics are textually mediated. By this she means that commodified genres of intimacy in literature, music, and film circulate among strangers, providing for them an affective language in which to make sense of this common emotional world. It is these commodified forms that make intimate publics public in the sense used by Michael Warner (2002) and others: they comprise a group united around a certain way of representing things. Berlant's idea of an intimate public is more loosely formed than either Warner's (2002) publics and counterpublics or Anderson's (1983) imagined communities. This looseness is due in a large part to intimate publics

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the music as an expression of Nepaliness. Those who do not identify with this music as a marker of identity and solidarity will often identify with Hindi film songs instead; such cases indicate another intimate public in which national identity is much less important to solidarity. A study of dance-only nightclubs could have illuminated such an intimate public among Nepalis in Manama, but nightclubs focusing on live song performance downplayed singing Hindi songs in favour of songs in Nepali, and thus drew patrons who enjoyed these Nepali-language songs.

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being what Berlant calls juxtapolitical: existing in close proximity to and in a relationship sometimes dependent on the political sphere, but cohering, again in part, around a desire for a space of respite from political struggle. In her own analysis of film, literature, and their reception in the United States, she argues that intimate publics value generality and normativity rather than oppositional stances, and that narrative tropes shape the ideas of generality that hold intimate publics together (Berlant 2008).

Attention to such circulating tropes and shared ways of interpreting and re-signifying them provides a way to study how intimate publics cohere, and what they do in public life. Yet intimate publics do not have to be limited to communities of the imagination based on receptions of texts; the social practice of imagination that binds them together also manifests in the material social actions of live performance, with its inherent risks and potential challenges to normative practice (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Butler 1993; Turner 1986). I suggest that it is also useful to expand what we think of as tropes to include aspects of musical sound, gesture, and dance. This expansion allows us to include live performance as a medium that also serves to unite publics, yet may not always be fixed in the form of a text. While analysis of cultural texts can provide great insights, recent ethnographic work on many popular music genres has highlighted the importance of attending to the processes of mediation, networks of circulation, and practices of appropriation and re-signification that join people in popular-music-based connections, forming identities and solidarities, from the fleeting to the well-established (Fiol 2011; Fox 2004; Novak 2013; Skinner 2014).

The Nepali nightclubs in Bahrain are spaces where different communities meet, and also spaces where practices of professional and amateur public singing, and popular music listening, converge. Looking at popular music listening and performance as part of intimate public formation allows us to understand intimate publics differently and to rethink their potential political nature. I argue that performance and performative practices of music listening trouble the distinction between musical production and reception that categorizes people as creative producers and mere consumers. With this concept of both listening and live performance as social action in mind, the idea that intimate publics are not political but merely

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'juxtapolitical', bears rethinking, with attention to what politics can be apart from rights-based campaigns for recognition or party-based power struggles.

The ethnography for this chapter centres on two Manama nightclubs. I take the nightclub as one point of intersection between practices of popular music listening and performance. In July 2010, I spent one intense week as a performer in one of these nightclubs, spending 7 p.m. to 3 a.m. onstage, and meeting Nepali migrants elsewhere in the greater Manama area in the daytime. I talked with performers and patrons before, after, and during performances and spent my days with the Nepali nightclub owners and the male performers who facilitated my meetings with other migrants and patrons outside of the nightclub setting. I also visited the competing Nepali nightclub for part of one evening. This research is part of a larger, multisited project on the international circulation of Nepali popular folk music, within which Bahrain is an important site in the world of popular music among Nepalis in the Gulf.[5]

NEPALI MIGRANTS IN BAHRAIN

Statistics for migration to the Gulf from all sending countries are famously unreliable. The Nepali Club in Manama, an organization of elite Nepalis in Manama established to serve Nepalis in Bahrain (which hosted no Nepali consulate), estimated that there are probably 30,000 Nepalis in the country. One of the owners of the Nepali nightclub at which I was based estimated that there were 50,000. According to the Nepal Migration Yearbook 2009, prepared by NIDS with official government statistics, there were 5,125 men and 594 women who left Nepal through documented channels for Bahrain in 2009 (NIDS 2010: 16).

[5] Thus, while I was in Bahrain itself only for a week, I have been working within the Nepali popular music scene in Nepal, the USA, and the UK since 2000 and I knew some of the performers at these Manama nightclubs from other nightclubs elsewhere in the transnational scene. While I have not been back to Bahrain since this visit, I continue to keep in touch with the performers I met there, most of whom have moved on to other performing jobs in Nepal, Europe, and Japan.

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Among the Nepalis in Bahrain, most are men working in construction and transportation, part of the "transnational proletariat" of unskilled, low-skilled, and low-prestige labourers (Gardner 2010a: 49). Women, as elsewhere in the Gulf, are mainly domestic workers. Many of them come through India rather than through official Nepali channels. According to the Nepali Club, an average of two undocumented Nepali women per week contact the Club for help in leaving their employers.

Those who come with higher education to work in skilled jobs, bring their families with them, and intend to make a life in Bahrain, can be seen as a "diasporic elite" (Gardner 2010a: 71). Men in this group are involved in the professions and in business: I met engineers, journalists, and entrepreneurs, as well as the men who ran the Nepali nightclubs. These men had also partnered in renovating and operating a historic Manama hotel, which demonstrates their wealth and connections in the Bahraini business world; they were not merely small-time nightclub owners. But neither do they act entirely independently. All businesses operated by foreigners are required to be run with a Bahraini partner, usually a silent partner who may or may not contribute funds or take a share of the profits. Most of these Nepali businessmen's wives do not work outside the home, but a few have entered the workforce in such various jobs as waitressing, retail, beauty parlours, and in at least one case, running her own restaurant.

Gardner argues that migrant workers in Bahrain are subject to a form of structural violence (Galtung 1969) tied closely to the kafala sponsorship system which requires all foreigners to have a citizen sponsor (*kafeel*) who is legally in charge of their actions while they are in the country. This system is not one codified law or policy, but a conglomeration of different policies that exist in similar ways across the Gulf States. The ways that it facilitates corruption and exploitation of workers by putting a power most often associated with the state into the hands of individual citizens have been well documented (Al-Najjar 2002; Gardner 2010a, 2010b; Longva 1997, 1999, 2005). Some aspects of sponsors' actions that are often commented upon in the press include the practice of keeping migrant workers' passports so that they cannot leave, as well as charging exorbitant fees for visa extensions and refusing to transfer or renew work permits. These practices have spread to non-citizens even though they cannot be legal

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sponsors, and the Nepali owners of Bahrain's nightclubs also hold on to their employees' passports for the duration of their employment. As Gardner argues, this system and its practices affect members of the transnational proletariat and diasporic elite alike.

THE NIGHTCLUBS

The nightclub industry links the elites and proletarian groups of migrant communities, as members of both groups attend nightly performances. These performances also bring them into contact with Bahrainis, Saudis, and members of other migrant communities. Diasporic elites from various sending countries run nightclubs aimed at their own populations, and these clubs are scattered throughout Manama souq and the more upscale business district, with several different clubs in each hotel.[6] They have live bands, karaoke, dance performances, and food and drink, including alcohol. Bahrain is known for its nightlife, and alcohol is legally available there, though subject to increasing regulation. In 2010 Bahrain's policy of allowing alcohol sales in three-star hotels presented a stark contrast to its much more strictly regulated neighbours, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.[7] On Thursday nights the causeway linking the island with Saudi Arabia is packed with cars with Saudi plates, full of men coming to enjoy a weekend of relative debauchery before returning to the comparatively austere environment across the border.

Men of the Nepali and Indian diasporic elites run the nightclubs in Manama in which Nepali performers are employed. These clubs are known in local parlance as 'Nepali bands'. Performers and wait-staff are recruited in Nepal, in many cases by the owners themselves, and

[6] The hotels in the Manama souq area which hosted Nepali nightclubs were classified as three-star hotels. Four-star and five-star hotels also host nightly live music performances, which are more high-end and expensively produced than those in three-star hotels.

[7] Alcohol is illegal in Saudi Arabia; in Qatar, it is available in one tightly regulated liquor store for expats, and in four and five-star hotels. Since 2014, Bahrain has adopted a policy similar to Qatar's, allowing alcohol sales in four- and five-star hotels only.

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in some cases by one employee who has been tasked with putting together a team. In 2010 there were two clubs that focused on live Nepali music, one run by Nepalis but focusing on Hindi film music, and at least three Indian-run dance restaurants that employed Nepalis but offered dance without live music. I focus here on clubs with live music.

I was based at one of the two Nepali Bands, in a hotel that also housed a snooker hall, an openly advertised brothel staffed by Bengali-speaking women, and two other nightclubs, Filipino and Bengali. The performers in the Nepali nightclub (which I will call Nepali Band I) included three male singer/instrumentalists, one female singer plus me (usually there were two female singers), and four female and one male dancers. Two of the dancers were new and arrived the same day I did, while others had been there for several months. The lead dancer and the team of musicians had been recruited by the main male singer, and were nearing the end of a two-year stint. There were nearly forty wait-staff,[8] some male but most female, and six male kitchen and bar staff. All were Nepali. Both Nepali owners were also present at the club every night.

A typical night proceeded in a similar sequence to those in Nepali musical restaurants elsewhere, moving from slower songs to more exuberant and participatory performances. Performers would warm up with a nationalist *raṣṭriya git*. Then, as customers began to trickle in, some would request to hear solo adhunik-style songs, and to see dances performed to particular songs in Nepali, Hindi, or Arabic. As the night went on, Nepali customers, emboldened by alcohol, would start requesting to sing solo songs with karaoke or live band accompaniment, or dohori, improvised male-female duets, with a singer onstage. Dohori songs were a primary responsibility of singers, who had to be quick with their improvised lyrics. According to performers and owners in both Nepali bands, this was the genre believed to embody the most Nepaliness, and to differentiate what Nepalis did in their nightclubs from what Indians did in theirs to the greatest

[8] This was double the usual amount due to the recent closing of another club. Nepali Band I had taken on its wait-staff temporarily, anticipating its re-opening.

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degree, beyond language, costumes, or dance style. While the owners and performers at Nepali Band and I proudly highlighted dohori as a unique aspect of Nepali culture, they were also quick to emphasize that what made their Nepali Band the best was the variety of genres they could perform.

When a customer requested to sing in any genre, wait-staff would deliver a wireless microphone, and the singer would sing from his table. Dancing by customers was strictly forbidden by law, a major difference from Nepali dohori restaurants elsewhere, where half the fun of requesting a song includes getting up with your whole party to dance to it. The majority of the patrons were young Nepali men who sang from their tables, visibly enjoyed the music, and found it hard not to dance. Dohori requests tended towards major dohori hits, all upbeat, danceable tunes rather than the slow, sad laments of many popular lok and adhunik songs dealing with migration. While yearning, sadness, longing, and *dukha* (suffering) were common song topics, they were all given upbeat musical settings, which for lok and dohori songs is common enough. Dances performed to Nepali songs were also popular requests. It was in the dances that Nepali diversity was demonstrated to the greatest degree. A range of costumes representing various ethnic, regional, and linguistic groups was paired with appropriate dances. From a few conversations with non-Nepali customers (mostly Indian, Bahraini, and Saudi), it was apparent that they did come for the 'something different' that Nepali performers had to offer. In a city riddled with nightclubs representing various nationalities, they wanted to see what the Nepalis did. Thus, Nepali Band I was oriented towards representing Nepaliness both to Nepalis and to members of other communities.

The other Nepali Band that was operating in 2010 (Nepali Band II) was much more oriented towards Nepali customers. This was the one that had hosted many of my friends in the Kathmandu dohori world as short-time performers for stints of three to six months, and it offered much more live dohori and much less of other genres. It had just reopened after being shut down due to a breakdown in the informal economy that keeps relations between nightclubs and police running smoothly, and was under more police surveillance than Nepali Band I. Thus, it had had to stick to the rules and hire no more than four performers. In Nepal, the average number of performers

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in a dohori restaurant is eleven; here at Nepali Band II, these four performers, two male and two female, faced the challenge of complying with requests usually meant for a much larger band. I was able to visit there only one night due to my agreement with Nepali Band I. In Nepali Band II, I interviewed the performers about their experiences. The female dohori singer was particularly struck by the fact that some customers wanted to sing dohori in Hindi, and frustrated that she couldn't do it. Other women who had been there before her had better Hindi, and had set a standard for Hindi-language dohori. All three of the singers at this club had talked with an Indian dohori fan who frequented both Nepali Bands about singing dohori in Hindi as a way to reach out to more customers beyond the Nepali speakers, and to introduce them to Nepali culture through dohori. They all thought such outreach was a good idea:

> Male singer 1: When we're there in Nepal, if one or two such customers come and they give a response that we can understand ... we feel good, right? For Hindi-speaking customers, if we sing in Hindi, then they can know that this is what dohori is, that it's touching, heart to heart, that it has these touching words, serious words just like in Hindi, and really loveable words, and words of frustration too, that's what we want them to know.
>
> Male singer 2: Yeah, we want them to understand dohori.

While both Nepali Bands offered more than songs and dances (including pool tables and video games), it was clear that the performers saw themselves as representing Nepal and Nepali culture on the nightclub stages, and that they wanted to develop the competence required to reach the greatest number of people.

PERFORMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR JOBS

As in Nepali musical restaurants elsewhere, the performers in Bahrain described themselves as performing artists, emphasizing their unique skills and talents over their status as migrant workers. I follow their lead in referring to them this way. The clearest reason why any artist would choose to work in one of Bahrain's Nepali Bands was the money. In contrast to the relationships of indenture common among Nepali migrants' manual labour experiences in the Gulf,

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performers wanted to go to the Gulf because there they would be sure to get paid. This was in direct contrast to performers' experiences in Nepal. Back in Nepal, many industries, including the restaurant and nightclub industry, are plagued by the practice of salary withholding. Employees will work for months without getting paid, depending on the continued assurance that their salary is forthcoming. For many, a performing job provides little guarantee of a steady income, regardless of the salary promised at the time of hiring. In 2009, most dohori restaurant performers in Nepal made salaries of Rs 5,000 per month, with perhaps Rs 1,000 more in tips. Dance restaurant performers' salaries were slightly lower, while their tips may have been slightly higher. At Nepali Band I, monthly salaries began at NRs 25,000, five times as much as the most common dohori restaurant salary in Nepal. The salary in Bahrain was guaranteed, and employees had few expenses as housing and meals were provided. Primarily for this reason, most performing jobs in the Gulf had a good reputation among Nepali artists.[9] They thus enjoyed a much higher level of prestige than manual labour jobs, which have the opposite reputation for delivering on their salary promises.

Individuals had different goals towards which they saved these salaries: main male lok git singer Prakash[10] planned to open his own recording company. Lead female dancer Archana ran a cultural centre in Kathmandu, and planned to invest in its expansion, as well as provide for a more secure future for her family. Male drummer and dancer Rubin, as well as dancers Jessica and Reema, hoped that their stints in Bahrain could lead to more work abroad and a chance to see the world. All hoped that their time abroad would prove helpful to their artistic careers.

Both male and female performers working at the three Nepali nightclubs I visited in Manama viewed their stint performing in the Gulf as a form of professional development and a way to raise their

[9] Some wait-staff and kitchen staff at these restaurants also told me that they were always paid their promised salaries on time, but I was not able to confirm this through broader participant observation as I was with the performers.

[10] All names have been changed to protect artists' privacy.

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status back home. And in many ways, it was, even by virtue of just being outside of Nepal. In Nepal, I have often been witness to the prestige accorded to foreign-returned artists, who are lauded publicly for having shared Nepali culture with the rest of the world, while 'local' artists get no such acclaim.[11] Just having been abroad increases an individual's prestige. The opportunity to broaden their artistic competence in the multiple genres called for at the Nepali Bands is also a draw—styles of singing and dancing that are less common in the dohori and dance restaurants in Nepal are requested much more regularly in Bahrain's more international environment, and in catering to customers' requests, artists get a wider range of experience. Between 2007 and 2010, many of the performers in Kathmandu and Pokhara's dohori and dance restaurants had done three-month to two-year stints in one of Bahrain's Nepali Bands, and they almost all had positive things to say about their experiences. For these reasons—salary, prestige and status, and increased musical competence—a stint in a Bahrain nightclub was a post coveted by both men and women in Nepal's performing community.

CHALLENGES AND EXPLOITATION

Performers' characterizations of their time in Bahrain as an opportunity for professional development were likely also part of their strategies for dealing with the limits placed upon them. This is especially true for women. While the male staff lived in an apartment around the corner from the club and were free to travel the city as they pleased, the female staff lived in a room in the same hotel as the club. The owners locked them in at night, and unlocked the door when they were due to come down to get ready for the night's performance, as well as for rehearsals, special parties, and visits to the boss's home once a year at the holiday of Dasain. Sandhya, a female lok and dohori singer who had spent three years at Nepali Band I and whom I interviewed in Kathmandu, praised this arrangement for its security measures. She said she felt safer in Bahrain than she ever had in Kathmandu, and

[11] For a discussion of the importance of being a 'foreign-returned' artist in India, see Neuman (1980).

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enjoyed being able to call men up who would cater to her every whim, bringing her everything from dinner to feminine hygiene products. She also enjoyed the respite from family troubles and the myriad uncertainties of working in Nepal, feeling that here she was valued as a performer, as shown by the fact that she and everyone else were guaranteed to get paid.

However, this is not to say that the professional and financial benefits of their jobs outweighed the costs of living behind locked doors for the women of the Nepali Bands. Sandhya herself came up against the limits of her valued sense of security when she had to fight to get her passport back after her contract had ended. To be allowed out of the room, much less out of the hotel, was an anomaly, and women had to adjust to living at close quarters with no privacy and nothing much to do. Dancer Jessica, who arrived the same time I did, was fed up after three days. Main female singer Shristi said to me sarcastically, "We have very good security here. LOTS of security." She envied the men's and my ability to go about as we pleased; because the club owners were not in charge of my visa, they did not lock me in or take my passport. Despite the benefits the nightclub staff mentioned, this 'security' or constraints on movement and communication with others puts them at risk of exploitation by those who hold the keys, as well as their passports, working permits, and the ability to fire them or withhold their salaries (this was always a fear because salary withholding was so common in Nepal and in other sectors in the Gulf, although, as noted, performers in these Bahrain nightclubs always did get paid). Reported incidents from clubs in other places in the Gulf make it clear that exploitation of many types does happen, and raise questions about the level of complicity between Nepali authorities and human traffickers abroad (Reporters Nepal 2007). While it was clear that the female performers in Nepali Band I were not being forced to engage in sex work,[12] I came across one instance of sexual exploitation of a female employee, and do not doubt that there were more. These Nepali performers' jobs in the Gulf may be less unstable than those of the unskilled labourers working for large companies, but the underlying kafala system remains the same.

[12] I was not able to find out if there was any kind of organized sex work among waitresses in the Nepali Bands.

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In order to deal with this system, workers in the Nepali Bands focus on things that they can control. Dance director Archana threw herself wholeheartedly into choreography and teaching the other dancers, and in our conversations she stressed how her two years in Bahrain had made her a better dance teacher and given her the skills she would need to better run her cultural centre back in Kathmandu. While in the room that all the female artists shared, Archana spent most of her time planning dances and details like costumes, hair, and makeup, watching the dances to the latest Hindi songs on TV, and encouraging the other dancers to do the same. Her focus on artistic achievement and competence allowed her to think of herself as an artist in control of her art rather than an object for the gaze of male customers, a woman behind locked doors, or a labourer engaged in making money for the nightclub owners, and to teach the other female dancers to see themselves the same way. This way of thinking parallels transformations in views of women's performance that have occurred over the last century throughout South Asia, as women of various backgrounds and performance genres try to reclaim the cultural value that was broadly accorded to women's music and dance before colonial interventions, and reframe it in terms of prestigious art and heritage as well as modern forms of middle-class female respectability.[13]

She also hoped that this focus on dance as art would enable the other dancers to advance in their careers once they moved on, and discussed her role as that of a teacher and 'social worker' who tried to help other women see themselves as agents working towards shaping their own futures, which would be based on how well they developed their talents for dance. Her attitude recalls Uttara Asha Coorlawala's discussion of the idea of *darshan* in relation to dance performance, where female performers' bodily presentation and display onstage is recast as part of a reciprocal relation with their audiences, where they direct the audience's sentiments through their dance or song (Coorlawala 1996; Shresthova 2011), rather than merely appearing onstage as objects of a one-way male gaze (Mulvey 1975). In this view,

[13] See Coorlawala (1996, 2012), Maciszewski (2007), Morcom (2014), Shresthova (2011), and Weidman (2007).

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performers affect audience members through their performances, and their competence is manifest in how well it moves the audience. Coorlawala, discussing the South Asian aesthetic theory of *rasa*, also argues that the audience also needs competence to be affected: some familiarity with the nuances of an art form is necessary to appreciate its codes and tropes (2012). Such a reciprocal understanding of the genres performed in these clubs is central to how performers and audience may come together as an intimate public, finding common ground in music that is familiar.

Without in-depth ethnography among audience members beyond the few with whom I was able to speak, it is hard to say whether this relationship of reciprocal affective connection does indeed exist between performers and audience members. Those audience members who did talk with me expressed that the performances did affect them, that they enjoyed them a great deal, and that such experiences were why they continued to visit the clubs. Whatever other audience members thought, the idea that performers did something that affected their audience was the primary way in which Archana and the other performers discussed what they did. This perspective is key to understanding how these female performers see themselves—strongly concerned with prestige and status, they emphasize that what they do is art (rather than mere entertainment in which they perform at a patron's whims), and that their performances are meant to be interactions with their audiences that provide affecting experiences. By adopting this attitude and focusing on what they believe they can control, they are able to improve their positions, within limits, both within the immediate world of work in Bahrain, and within the music industry upon their return to Nepal.

CUSTOMERS AND CONSUMPTION AS PERFORMANCE: THE LABOURERS

As a woman who could go outside the hotel, I was able to meet with some of the regular patrons from the Nepali Bands during the daytime as well as visit other nightclubs at night, always accompanied by the male musicians, who were nearing the end of their time there and had come to know the city well. One day, with the male musicians,

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I went to visit a labour camp[14] where their driver friends lived, along with dozens of very young men employed as manual labourers with a construction company. The drivers' room seemed to be a meeting place, with a TV and piles of Nepali VCDs. The young men gathered around and answered Prakash's and my questions about their experiences: "We haven't gotten to do any good work since we've been here. We just run machines and that's all ... and for two years, what? We pass the time." "When we think about the salary, we don't even feel like working." Then we talked about which VCD we should watch: Should it be a sad one "like Pardeshi Dai", the lok adhunik album that made one young labourer's "heart fall to pieces", as he put it, or should it be something lively, to remind them that they can still dance, even in hard times?

The drivers and the manual labourers concurred about the importance of music in their lives, and linked their practices of listening to music, and sometimes performing in nightclubs, to their desires to sing, to play instruments, to become musicians when they returned to Nepal. While abroad and alone, especially on long drives, music was their "main friend now". They measured long drives by how many dohori tapes they would play between one place and another. They saw music, in its commodity form as VCDs and cassettes and as performed in nightclubs and at cultural programmes, as a link to a wider world of shared Nepali sentiments that they could join by listening and singing along, and they were partial primarily to lok, dohori, lok pop, and lok adhunik. That is, the world of affective connections to which they wanted to belong was one of both the migrant laments that dealt with disappointment wherever they went, and a celebration of love and the world back home in Nepal, where the homeland stood for the normative versions of domestic love and wholeness to which they at least sometimes aspired. I suggest that their practices of music listening were themselves performative, that is, they were actions through which they created a shared sense of a world to which

[14] A 'labour camp' is the term used for any place where foreign manual labourers live, and applies to many different kinds of residences. See Bruslé (2010, 2012c), Chapter 9 in this volume, and Gardner (2010c).

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they wished to belong. These practices became a way of fulfilling desires for connection, in *dukha-sukha*, sorrow and happiness, always two sides of the same coin. This use of music to create connection with others around shared affective orientations was visible in their visits to the Nepali Bands as customers.

CUSTOMERS' PERFORMANCES

Nepali customers made up over half of Nepali Band I's audience, and there were many regulars. These were mostly men with mid-level jobs such as drivers and airport workers, but some manual labourers, and women accompanied by men,[15] also attended the performances. Customers' restaurant performances included both live dohori and karaoke. I focus here on karaoke as I have written extensively about dohori elsewhere. I also wish to point out the parallels between commercially performed dohori and karaoke: as in karaoke, restaurant dohori's improvised couplets also use tunes from recordings as their basis and refer intertextually to lyrics from recordings, from literature, and from oral tradition, thus bringing together aspects of 'mediated' and 'live' musical spheres.

Rather than merely reproducing or consuming the original song (Adams 1996), performers of karaoke and restaurant dohori shape sociality through their creative performance. Deborah Wong (1994) relates Asian-American karaoke performance to pre-existing practices of amateur public singing, and Tyler Bickford (2006) describes how in a New York karaoke bar, karaoke reflects pre-existing patterns of popular music listening, based not just on singing but on singing along. Attention to the different types of sociality engendered in practices based on singing together and those based on listening together is as useful, in parsing the similarities and differences between 'singing' and 'singing along', among Nepalis as it is among New Yorkers. Bickford argues that karaoke, music "mediated and live" (cf. Keil 1984; also see Grandin 1989), taps into shared knowledge of the musical

[15] All the women I met who attended Nepali Band I as customers were there with their husbands. They were over 30 and members of the professional elite.

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commodities of recordings and music videos. Re-enactment of key musical or gestural aspects of a well-known original is one important part of making connections among audience members, building a fleeting social solidarity in a roomful of strangers through reference to audio and video recordings most of them know, and affirms the performative interrelationship between listening and performance. Karaoke performance seen in this way is a version of the "intimacy among the multitude" once attributed to collective film viewing (Carlos Monsivais, cited in García Canclini 1995: 150), emphasizing the intimate in the individual performance, while alluding to the multitude with references to original recordings assumed to be known by those present and by a wider public to which they imagine themselves to belong.

Karaoke in Bahrain's dohori restaurants connects the more recent phenomenon of recorded music and its circulation and consumption to the previously existing practices of singing that the recorded lok git, lok pop, and dohori songs themselves also reference. In Nepali Band I and in the broader Nepali migrant community, there is a fetish of original recordings' sounds, as well as a preference for liveness. This means that musicians and owners are apologetic about their use of a karaoke machine, wishing that they were able to re-create everything with a larger band as is done in Nepal. Most performances using the karaoke machine, sung by customers from the floor or by performers onstage, are Hindi songs and lok pop songs—songs in which the background arrangement carries more importance than in lyrics-focused dohori.[16] In these genres the original version carries authority, while in dohori, originals are often soon forgotten. The ability of certain well-known lok pop introductions (for example, the opening guitar chords in Nepathya's lok pop hit Jomsome Bazaarma, or the man clearing his throat that opens Khem Raj Gurung's Wari Jamuna, Pari Jamuna) to invoke reactions of recognition in the audience is such that band members try to

[16] It is possible that Hindi songs may act as vehicles for pan-South-Asian solidarity among workers in Bahrain, but the level of engagement with non-Nepali customers and other nightclubs that would be required to pursue this line of enquiry was beyond the scope of this research.

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reproduce them faithfully when not using the karaoke machine, and customers requesting to sing Wari Jamuna, Pari Jamuna might start clearing their throats into the microphone before the play button has even been pushed.

The way karaoke performance can be used to create moments of heightened sociable experience was apparent in a performance of The Sky Band's Gaunma Mela Lagya Chha by a group of labourers at Nepali Band I. The song is a lok pop number on the theme of a migrant man remembering his village and the girl waiting for him there, which includes improvised rap sections and lyrical verses. The music underlying the rap sections quotes the folk song Sindhuli Gadhi. In this performance at Nepali Band I, two men took the microphone in turn: one for the lyrical verses, singing the words as written, and one for the rap sections, making up his own lyrics. It was an interesting hybrid of the faithful karaoke characteristic of most lok pop, adhunik, and Hindi song performances and the focus on improvised lyrics characteristic of live dohori. When the men began singing, those at their table were clapping along, but as the song went on, their entire section of the restaurant began to clap and sing along, and they seemed to be trying very hard not to stand up and break the dancing ban. "There's a festival in the village ... Kanchi is calling me ..." these words, typical of songs of masculine migrant longing, united these men in a sentiment that was palpable in the breaks of the singer's voice and the increasing intensity of the group's clapping and 'dancing' in their seats. As the men at the labour camp had said, sometimes it was good to play the sad ones. But like many of the sad songs in Nepali commercial folk music, this one also had a rousing beat, and the combination of sentiment and musical energy brought the Nepalis in the room together in an overflowing of raw affect. The singers performed their identification with the song's sentiments as they sang, and the other men in the room also did so by clapping, moving rhythmically, and eventually, singing along. Here originality in performance was not the point. Rather, this public, performative identification with a masculine migrants' community of sentiment used the sounds of popular folk song as a touchstone for intersecting, inter-textual references to experiences in the present and in the past that they felt they all shared. As they sang along and tried not to get up and dance, they shared the experience of loneliness in a

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foreign land and the idealized familial wholeness of a lok pop version of home.

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The question remains: what of the political is there in the intimate public of Nepali popular folk music among migrants in the Gulf? Lok pop in particular has been accused of being anti-political, of positioning an idealized Nepali village faraway in time and place, and thus removing lok pop listeners from the political realities of contemporary rural Nepal (Greene 2002/2003).[17] While this reading may still apply in certain situations, perhaps among urban Nepali youth who have never lived in a village, this is not (or is no longer) the genre's primary meaning among migrants in the Gulf, most of whom grew up in and may return to homes in villages once their labour contracts are up. Rather, lok pop, with its mixture of genres associated with foreign prestige and intimate Nepali village spaces, stands for the back-and-forth these migrants experience between places associated with past and present, ideas of tradition and modernity, and the mixture of both that exists in Nepali villages. Returned migrants walk village trails with boomboxes blasting lok pop as well as lok git and dohori—the lok git sounds are the familiar sounds of home, the rock, pop, and hip-hop elements those of a home forever transformed by their travel, return, and continued mobility. Replacing all the lok git elements of these songs with rock, pop, hip-hop, or Hindi sounds would not have the same emotional resonance, because these very folk elements express the intimacy of being from a village: of having a village, with all its faults, as home (cf. Nandy 2001; Herzfeld 2005).

[17] This interpretation also relies on a perspective on studio techniques that associates echo, reverb, and delay with echoes of the past, ignoring the importance of echo as a key part of much rural hill folk music that uses the hills *in live performance* specifically to produce echoing sounds as part of a desired performance aesthetic. Here echo is a key element of sonic emplacement in an immediate hill village world, rather than one that is far away in time and space. I am not arguing that Greene's interpretation is incorrect, but rather that it is not totally representative of how all villagers in hill villages and those who have migrated elsewhere currently hear and produce lok pop.

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This culturally intimate use of music as an assertion of belonging brings the idea of an intimate public as almost political, but not quite, into question. In describing intimate publics as juxtapolitical, Berlant relies on a definition of the political sphere that limits it to that of rights-based struggles in a public realm. The intimate public of Nepali popular folk music is more than a space of respite from day-to-day struggles; it is a space of heightened sociability, where music is a medium for experiencing belonging and actively shaping the world to which one belongs. Performances, including improvised dohori, dances to recorded songs, full-band performances of adhunik songs, karaoke, and performative listening practices, exceed the narratives that recorded songs supply, reconfiguring the ways that their messages of normative migration and family situations are understood, accepted, or rejected. They themselves are sites for individual and group struggles, for assertions of presence in public space on their own terms. Thus migrants' performative assertion of belonging and social solidarity through popular music can itself be seen as a political act. Uniting around the feelings that popular music engenders is an act of agency and resistance as individuals refuse to be defined only as labourers, insisting on their personhood. In the Gulf, where migrants' public struggles are so severely circumscribed by the kafala system, by laws limiting their movements in public space, by language barriers, by the discourses and exigencies that shape migration policies at home in Nepal, and by the challenges that lead them to migrate in the first place, the political importance of such seemingly mundane assertions of emotional solidarity becomes even stronger.

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9

'NO ONE WANTS TO GO ABROAD; IT'S ALL ABOUT OBLIGATION'

WHAT MIGRATION MEANS TO NEPALI WORKERS IN QATAR

Tristan Bruslé

—We are sent abroad (*bidesh*) by our parents.
—Some of us, after quitting studies, wish (*rahar lagnu*) to come here to see how it is, what there is.
—In Nepal, there's nothing (*kehi chhaina*), no job (*rojgar chhaina*). We tell ourselves 'after reaching abroad, I can earn a little money, perhaps I'll be able to help my family'. That's the goal (*udeshya*) we Nepalis pursue.
—Even if we have enough food, even if we work from dawn to dusk, we can't save money, we don't have enough money (*paisa hundaina*). If someone falls ill, we need money to buy drugs. To give a good education (*gyan*) to our children, we also need money. That's our aim.

(Nepalis in a labour camp dormitory talking about why they came to Qatar–fieldwork notes)

VOICING THE MEANING OF MIGRATION

AS A SOCIAL GEOGRAPHER INTERESTED in the experience of Nepali migrants, and in the details of the ways it is articulated, I note that there is

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no single term for 'migration' in Nepali. *Basai sarai*, that is, 'changing one's residence', is mainly employed in the context of internal migration, whereas *bidesh janu, bidesh lagnu*, or *bidesh hidnu* (to go abroad) are used to talk about international labour migration from Nepal.[1] Indeed, studying a migrant's vocabulary—the words of an insider—is a way of penetrating a migrant's culture. This phenomenological approach also has its place in migration theories (Massey et al. 1993) and reflects the cultural turn adopted in the social sciences more generally (King 2011). Rather than defining explanatory models—since the relevance of explanations varies somewhat when the study is based on qualitative interviews—listening to migrants recount their experiences and explain their reasons for migrating can be heuristically fruitful. I thus propose a subjective or "emic perspective, which tries to understand migrants on their own terms, from the inside" (King 2011: 138). This chapter therefore sets out to examine the reasons for migration at the ground level by analysing what Nepali migrants actually say and, in particular, the vocabulary they use when they talk about why they came to Qatar. By focusing on how migrants explain, and talk about, their migration, I aim to reintroduce migrants' agency to discussions of the migration phenomenon. My goal is not to discuss the migrant's rationality, to decide if, economically speaking, he is acting rationally or not. Nor will I attempt to clarify "driver complexes" (Van Hear, Bakewell, and Long 2012: 23) that are beyond a migrant's realm of understanding.[2] Rather, by understanding how migrants themselves conceptualize migration, we are able to grasp migration as a cultural practice entrenched in household and

[1] The verb *bideshinu*, 'to go abroad', is sometimes heard and seems to have been created recently. Otherwise, men commonly refer to their experience abroad as foreign employment (*baideshik rojgar*).

[2] The debate about migration drivers has recently been galvanized by researchers from the International Migration Institute (IMI) and from the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford. The special issue of *The Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (Vol. 36(10), 2010) deals with the subject. In their ambition to review and build migration theories related to social change, migrants' voices are virtually absent.

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individual strategies. It also helps us to link these discourses to literary accounts of Nepali migration where pain and suffering (*dukha*) are described as major exile experiences (Hutt 1998). The question asked is then not so much 'why do migrants leave?' but 'how do migrants talk about why they came?'. As shown in the above excerpt from a discussion between Nepali workers, the obligation versus desire dualism structures migrants' discourses. The question therefore is: How does this duality help us to understand migration as a social fact and as a social experience? What does this dualism tell us about migrants' own conceptions of migration and about the making of a "culture of migration" (Cohen 2004)?

The raw material for this article was collected over the course of interviews and discussions between the author and numerous Nepali men in Qatar in 2006, 2008, and 2011. The large number of men interviewed and constant reference to a limited number of themes gives me confidence that the discourses I am about to describe were not created merely during the momentary interaction between the researcher and subjects. Furthermore, testimonies found in the media and in historical and literary narratives of migration show considerable continuity with migrants' discourses. Interviews were conducted in Nepali in migrant *labour camps*[3] and in other Nepalese places such as restaurants or markets. I do not have any statistical data about the migrants I interviewed: I assume that most of them belong to the rural middle class. Some have enough land and food to feed their family all year round, whereas others do not. A sample of 200 men taken in 2008 showed that their standard of education was above average for Nepal and that upper castes were over-represented (Bruslé 2010). Having talked both formally and informally with dozens of Nepali migrants, I will outline a middle-ground discourse reflecting what is most commonly heard in Qatar.

For heuristic purposes, the chapter is divided into migrants' dominant discourses. I will first present the situation of Nepalis in Qatar, who seem to be stuck in low-paid jobs. I will then show how a majority

3 In Gulf countries, the main form of worker accommodation is *labour camps*: packed dormitories where men spend most of their time when not working (Bruslé 2012a). See Figures 9.1 and 9.2.

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discourse holds that migration is an obligation, before evoking the other side of the dichotomy, freely desired migration. By situating both these notions in a migration project perspective, I will show how expatriation is seen as a way of achieving future goals. In conclusion, we will see how narratives of suffering contribute to establishing a culture of migration.

NEPALIS IN QATAR: AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SOCIAL LADDER

Knowledgeable insiders estimate that Nepalis represent at least 10 per cent of the total foreign workforce in the Gulf, that is, approximately 1.5 million people, working both legally and illegally.[4] In Qatar, the rapid growth of the Nepalese manpower business is both due to the recruitment boom since the beginning of the 2000s and to the Nepalis' ever-growing desire to work abroad (Bruslé 2012a). The structural need for workers in Qatar combined with Nepalis' eagerness to work has produced an expanding migration system that involved about 400,000 Nepalis in 2013, more than 95 per cent of whom were men. Despite the existence of a labour agreement signed between Nepal and Qatar in 2005, Nepali workers suffer from a double disadvantage—in terms of their status on the Qatari job market and regarding their living conditions during the time they are resident in the Gulf.

Nepalis commonly complain of the existence of ethnic labelling that confines them to a particular labour niche or at least to badly paid jobs. The reified image of Nepali workers, that is, Nepalis are brave, hardworking, obedient, and easy to satisfy—was inherited from the mercenary reputation of the Gurkhas and this has been passed on by all parties involved in the representation of Nepali manpower, from the Nepalese Embassy to manpower agencies. This stereotype both

[4] The exact number of Nepalis in the Gulf countries is unknown. Neither sending nor receiving governments publish data based on nationality. The Nepali Embassy in Doha relies on Qatari officials for data, including the number of 'illegal' Nepalis (most of them having run away from their employers), which may amount to 30,000.

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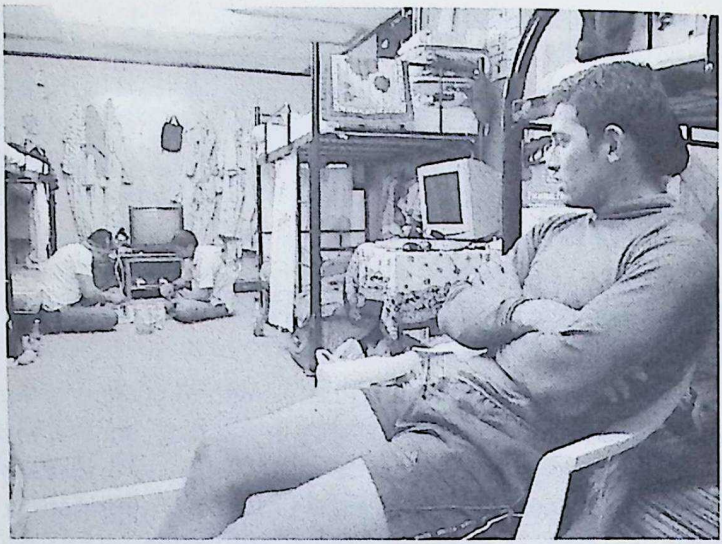

Figure 9.1 Passing time in Qatar: Nepali men spend most of their non-working time in their dormitories, cooking food, watching movies, playing on their mobile phone, or just waiting.

Source: T. Bruslé (January 2011).

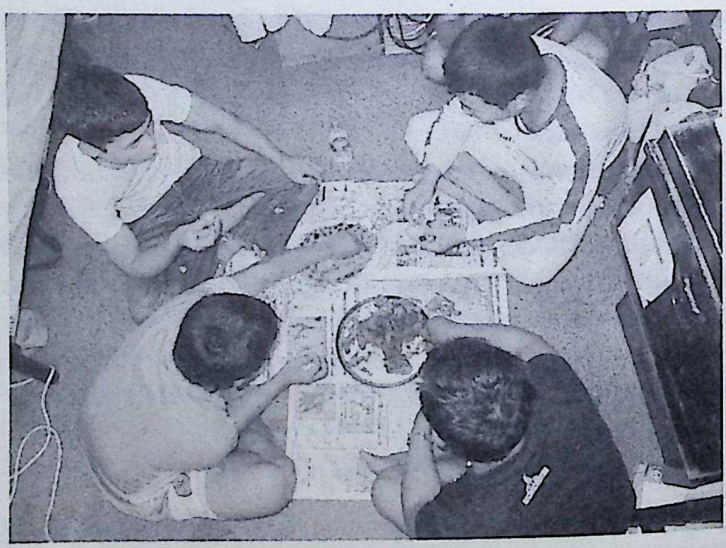

Figure 9.2 As a change from the canteen food, which they consider tasteless, Nepalis often order chicken curry to share in their room.

Source: T. Bruslé (September 2011).

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facilitates the situation for Nepali workers and inhibits their social mobility (Bruslé 2012b). Indeed, in Qatar, as well as in other Gulf countries, Nepali men mostly work as low-paid labourers, such as construction workers, cleaners, or office boys. Women, who number about 3,500, are employed as domestic helpers, cleaners, or saleswomen.[5]

In the absence of an official minimum monthly wage in Qatar, the embassies representing migrant workers, through which job contracts transit for official approval, fix the rates below which no employment contract can be signed. In January 2013 the Nepalese government decided to raise the minimum monthly wage from 800 Qatari Riyals ($219) to 1,200 QR ($329) in order to align it with other countries that send workers to the Gulf and thus raise remittances. This will surely reinforce the attraction for *bidesh* and create both hopeful and desperate individual situations, given the large number of cases of fraud and the lack of protection that workers are provided. In all too many cases, labour rights exist on paper only, particularly within the framework of the sponsorship (kafala) system. Employees cannot change jobs without their employer's consent; nor are they allowed to set up or join a trade union. Their collective and individual bargaining power is practically non-existent. Laws meant to protect workers from brokers or employers are rarely applied. In short, the Qatari state does not take seriously the issue of workers' rights (Human Rights Watch 2012), as demonstrated by the type of lodging where Nepalis are predominantly housed.[6]

Indeed, the second form of relegation pertains to migrants' living spaces. Qatar has a long tradition of spatial segregation (between nationals and slaves, men and women) that is based today on nationality and class (Nagy 2006) and marital status. Qataris, who enjoy the benefits of a generous welfare state, live in areas with their fellow

[5] Domestic workers are amongst the most vulnerable as they are isolated women in private houses. Many are victims of sexual harassment and violence.

[6] Despite poor working and housing conditions Nepalis still come to Qatar. Information about migration is relayed from migrants to would-be migrants in a selective manner and does not tell the whole story.

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countrymen, whereas foreigners, depending on their status, live in up-market gated communities or residential family neighbourhoods. In 2010, according to Qatari statistics, 62 per cent of *bachelors*, as single male migrants residing in Qatar are called, were housed in 'labour camps'. About 340,000 Nepalis live in this type of accommodation which is mainly situated far from town centres in industrial areas (Bruslé 2012b). These derelict, neglected zones, with high concentrations of factories, garages, warehouses, and workers' dormitories, demonstrate how Qatari society views migrant workers. Living in a *labour camp* is to live cut off from society—since buses into Doha centre are few and far between—in areas "where no human being would ever like to live", as one migrant told me. This system of exclusion has been reinforced by rules that are both permanent (such as the eviction of bachelors from residential areas as of November 2011) and temporary. The latter that consist in 'Family day rules' that apply on Fridays, the only day off in the week, when South Asian bachelors are not allowed to visit the zoo, the malls, or to walk along Doha's shoreline. Exclusion is thus an everyday experience in the life of Nepali workers.

GOING ABROAD AS AN OBLIGATION

बाध्यता	Forced
बिदेशी हुनुपरेको छ, गरिबीले गर्दा	Due to poverty I'm bound to be a foreigner [to live abroad]
लाश उठाउने सम्म हुदैन, यहाँ मान्छे मर्दा	When someone dies, no one is here to carry the corpse
मान्छेको मर्म बुझिदिने, कोही छैन यहाँ	There is no one here to understand a man's suffering
संसार नै स्वार्थि भईसक्यो, निस्वार्थ संसार खोज्नु कहाँ	It's useless to look for a generous world—the whole world has become selfish.

(Posted on Facebook by T.L.)

The act of going abroad is more often than not described in negative terms. Migration is felt to be an obligation, something that one has to do under duress. I was told: "Going abroad is not a happy desire,

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it's an obligation" (*khusiko rahar hoina, badhyata bhayo*).[7] To support their arguments, migrants list all the grievances that, according to them, forced them to leave their country. Their own analysis therefore very much resembles a push-factor scholarly one: the migrant considers himself to be a pawn in a global game in which he is forced to play the victim. Going to Qatar could not be avoided and was in keeping with his condition as a poor farmer living in a poor country. What is noticeable at this stage of the migration process, for first-time migrants, is the almost total lack of knowledge about working and housing conditions in Qatar. Scant information is provided by returnees, so newcomers cannot imagine what life abroad is really like: "Returning from the Gulf (*khadi desh*), they say that everything went well, even if it's not true." A migrant's symbolic capital (his pride and honour in returning successfully) conflicts with the information that is actually passed on. It would also appear that first-time migrants do not wish to learn more about their fellow countrymen's plight because 'they have to go' anyway.

'*Nepal garib desh ho*' (Nepal is a poor country). The understanding that Nepal is a poor country, that there is nothing in Nepal (*kehi pani chaina*), comes as no revelation in Qatar but is certainly accentuated by the immense wealth of the 'host' country. Living in a poor country translates as viewing themselves as poor, which is experienced as a social stigma.[8] They describe a vicious circle where poverty is both materially and socially implicated from one place to another. Poverty leads to a total lack of opportunities and in particular to the complete absence of a job market: "in Nepal, there are no private or government jobs" (*rojgar, jagir chhaina*), "no industry" (*udyog chhaina*). Most of the time, however, migrants admit to never having looked for a job in

7 One Facebook group is called 'To be a foreigner is our obligation, not a desire' (*Pardeshi hunu hamro badhyata ho rahar hoina*). One migrant has even chosen his surname as 'Going abroad is not a desire, it's an obligation' (*pardeshinu rahar hoina badhyata*). These two examples are representative of the duality of discourses about migration.

8 Migrants often attribute the way they are treated in Qatar to their meagre resources and to their lack of strength to rebel, by stating for example that, 'We cannot oppose, otherwise we will be deported, but we need the money'.

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Nepal, either because, they say, they do not know any influential men (*thulo manchhe*) who could open doors for them into the civil service, or because the jobs available in the private sector are beyond their reach or considered demeaning. In addition, jobs in agriculture are more and more often described as shameful (*sharam*), in particular by those who have acquired a good level of education, that is, above SLC (Aubriot and Bruslé 2012; Gartaula et al. 2012). Hence, with Nepal not providing a sufficiently open job market and with migrants being averse to accepting traditional manual labour, there is an overwhelming feeling that they cannot do anything (*kehi gare pani pugdaina*) about the unemployment they face in their home country.

A migrant's perception of his country mirrors the situation of his own household (*gharko sthiti* or *gharko abastha*). The household economy is weak (*arthik sthiti kamjor*); many problems (*samasya*) arise concerning its daily livelihood (*gujara*), raising the family (*parivar palnu*), and providing food (*khana*). In these still rural societies the land ownership issue is decisive in whether or not constraints are imposed on the household, especially since the country is no longer self-sufficient, just like 60 per cent of rural households (Joshi and Maharjan 2007). Landowners have small landed properties (*jamin thorai*) and therefore food has to be bought. However, in a context where "there is no way to earn money" (*paisa kamauna sadhan chhaina*) either by selling food grain or work, or where "there is no money" (*paisa hundaina*), working away from the village is seen as the only solution. All these remarks remind me of what an old woman in Nepal told me about her son who worked in India: "Agriculture has sent him away" (*krishile pathayo*).

Being the father or son of an extended poor or middle-class peasant family does not provide many opportunities in life but, on the contrary, generates many constraints (*majburi*), especially because there is a great sense of duty towards one's family. More often than not, what an individual does reflects what the household has in mind for him: the notion of 'having to' (*parnu*) introduces a high degree of responsibility in the life of the individual. As witnessed by migrants, there is some continuity between their path through life and the household situation. There is seemingly little discussion within families about whether to go abroad or not, as if this issue was a structural element of the household economy: it is taken for granted that the family burden is to be borne by the future migrant.

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Sometimes the mother of an unemployed young man may herself tell him to go (*'ja' amale bhanyo*). Or, as in the case of Santa T., a father may decide where his son should go. Santa T.'s father told him: "Don't enrol in the Gurkha regiment, don't go to India, go abroad (*bidesh*). What do you prefer to consume? A hot bullet or a hot climate (*tato goli ki tato gham khane*)?" Yet most of the time, the decision to leave seems to have been totally internalized and is taken by the migrant himself who explains his choice by his moral obligations: "I had to move" (*hidnu paryo*), "I had to come [to Qatar]" (*aunu paryo*). Even if the survival of the family does not depend on the act of migrating, to move out of Nepal is necessary (*avashyak*) for the economic well-being of the extended household. As nobody comes purely for fun (*raharle kohi pani aundaina*), going abroad is described as being the opposite of happiness: "Nobody comes because they are happy [at home], everybody comes because they suffer" (*kohi pani sukhle aundaina, sabai dukhle*). This obligation continues when the migrant arrives in Qatar with a huge debt to pay off:[9] the migrant has to stay (*basnu paryo*) and endure (*sahanu paryo*) the working and housing conditions inherent to life in exile. "We come here to earn money after leaving our children" (*bal baccha chhodera yahan kamauna aeko*), "We stay here weeping" (*roera basnu*): the stay abroad is of little value because it creates a rupture with one's family and one's place of belonging. Furthermore, the working and living conditions are sometimes compared to life in jail (Bruslé 2012a). The migrant's situation is also associated with death as shown in the introductory poem. Describing oneself as a 'forced migrant' is concurrent with not taking pride in migrating, at least when migrants' discourses are heard in Qatar.

In migrants' dominant discourse pertaining to obligation, family and national structures prompt the migrant to move. Poverty is described as a curse, as something they cannot escape either in their immediate situation or at national level—or even globally—and sometimes as a fault which is not theirs. They are destined to live abroad like a slave (*gulam*). So when a migrant describes himself as having no control over his life, there is a desire to distance himself from

9 Loans are usually taken out for the first migration to pay brokers and manpower agencies. They can amount to 1,500–2,000 USD.

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Figure 9.3 Three men walk back from their work in a construction site to their camp in Al Khor.

Source: T. Bruslé (October 2006).

the decision. Is it possible to explain the rationality behind choosing migration and enduring the disgraceful living conditions? Certainly not. This coherent discourse brings together masculinity, a sense of duty that derives from their youth, the course of their life, and the cultural context—all these combine to produce the conclusion that they are not the masters of their own destiny.

MIGRATION AS MOTIVATED DESIRE

The other side of the obligation versus desire dualism, that is, expressing a desire to leave, is far less common. Those who 'dare' to admit this desire are usually younger and with no family responsibilities when first undertaking this adventure. They may also be richer (in terms of landownership) than the average migrant. However, as I do not possess full economic data for all the migrants I interviewed,

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I suppose that some of them may have boasted about their situation to try to distinguish themselves from the dominant migrant discourse.

Ascribing a different meaning to migration from the one that is commonly acknowledged is a way of standing out from the crowd and of proving that the choice is personal, not to say individualistic. One may pride oneself on having chosen to migrate, contrary to the majority who were forced to do so. It could also be interpreted, in a class-based analysis, as a way of setting oneself outside structural poverty. Middle-class migrants would therefore posit their non-constrained agency. When a migrant states that he came of his own free will (*aphno bicarle*), that he made up his own mind (about household economics or his personal aspirations) and decided to live abroad, he underlines his agency: "I wanted to go abroad (*bidesh jana man lagyo*) and I did it." The migrant thus describes his control over life in a context where so far farming was the only possible occupation for most farmers' sons. He sees himself (or would like others to regard him) as an independent decision-maker. In saying that he chose to work abroad, he also asserts his independence regarding family constraints and strategies, and proves that he has no financial worries. Although his status among co-workers in Qatar may consequently be enhanced, asserting a personal desire that may be interpreted as fleeing one's responsibilities may expose him to contempt on the part of his fellow migrants.

Those who wish to go abroad are motivated to do so by the novelty of *bidesh*. Such a discourse focuses on the idea of discovering a foreign land and of seeing with their own eyes 'what Qatar is really like' (*kasto rahechha bidesh*). The desire to get away from farming, to lead a modern life, is also recurrent and is an aim that is difficult to achieve in Nepal (Adhikari and Hobley 2011; Bruslé 2012c). This aspirational aspect may not be linked to any social class but to a more encompassing thirst for novelty. It thus expresses a new kind of outlook on the world, which should be welcomed and left open to them.

> Before, I wasn't thinking about my family; I just thought, "I'll do that, I'll do this." Then I told myself, let's go once (*jaon*). Let's see how it is to live in one room all together (*sabai ekai kothama kasto rahechha*), let's go and earn money (*paisa kamaon*). A friend of mine convinced me to follow him, "Let's go together, let's do it, let's do it," he said. I was studying at college and everyone was leaving the village. Then I told myself: "What is the use

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> of staying here like that?" I was not a good student anyway. My parents told me: "If you do not want to study, make up your mind. I see that your mind is already abroad (*timro dimag bideshtira chha*)." I did not come here out of obligation (*badhyata*), my father did not send me. (C.M., 28 years old)

As the words of C.M. show, the meaning of migration is closely associated with a normative model that is hegemonic among the entire younger generation, that of *bidesh* (abroad). The absence of all able-bodied men in the village, who have all gone abroad, combined with the material success of a few families thanks to remittances, are strong incentives for men to leave their village. One after the other, young men leave making other young men 'want to go' (*rahar pani lagyo*). A neighbour with little schooling riding round on a motorcycle on their return from Saudi Arabia or Malaysia obviously makes a schoolgoing youngster in Nepal envious. The relative deprivation discussed by Massey et al. (1993) is perfectly illustrated here. In symbolic terms, the Gulf migrant benefits from a much higher status than the migrant who crosses the border to India. Thus, by comparing himself to young men who have migrated, a young man might feel tempted to migrate merely to become a 'big man' (*thulo manchhe banaunu*). Finally, to say that migrating was a decision taken intentionally is a way of asserting one's agency in a world where family logic (concerning work, marriage, residence) still determines a large part of an individual's destiny.

THE FUTURE AS AN OBJECTIVE

Even though the obligation versus desire dualism reflects the way that men lend meaning to migration, another realm of meaning that makes migration a plan-oriented act should also be mentioned. Migration is indeed closely related to the actual plight of the migrant's household and is also "a cause and consequence of aspirations" (Czaika and Vothknecht 2010). The future (*bhabishya*) of the household fills the whole horizon. Yet the way the future is viewed varies according to how the household demography and economy evolve. Along with individual life paths (weddings, the birth of children, or the death of parents), migration projects may change, in time, so that the meaning of their stay abroad may evolve from a desire (*rahar*) to

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an obligation (*badhyata*). Whatever the case, migrants fly out to Qatar full of dreams (*sapana bokera*) of improving their family situation and of changing their family's status.

To 'do something' (*kehi garnu*) abroad is a very simple objective, as opposed to remaining idle in the village (*khali basnu*). Since a young person shuns agricultural work if they interrupt their studies, and with their friends all gone, their boredom can be alleviated by doing something, that is working abroad to 'make progress' (*aghadi janu*). Progress is measured by money: "The main reason (*karan*) for migrating is money (*paisa*)". However, a migrant never aims at getting rich but paints a rather humble picture: "I want to earn a few rupees (*dui-car paisa, ali ali paisa*) and then go home". Once in Qatar migrants rapidly realize that their monthly earnings are low and that if they really want to save, they will have to stay in Qatar a long time.[10]

The primary objective of migration is overwhelmingly to provide one's children with an education (*gyan dinu*) by sending them to a private school ('boarding school' in Nepali). It is in fact rather paradoxical that there is such faith in education since many of the men who end up working in Qatar have passed their SLC and some even have university degrees. But education is not always seen as a substitute for migration: "I'd like my son to come back to Qatar, not as *labour* like me, but as an engineer or a doctor." In this case, the future of the family is still associated with abroad. A migrant's immediate goal may not be to buy land and build a new house. However, after a few years, if savings have helped to secure the household economy, this is a possible reason for staying abroad. Younger migrants mostly envisage buying land in Nepal near a town where the infrastructure and schools are better and with nearby markets. Cherishing a plan to purchase land far from one's native village is also a way of distancing oneself from the inherited status of farmer (Aubriot and Bruslé 2012). In this case, migration does not mean a return to the old order but the creation of new social spaces back home. It is seen as a way of

[10] It takes at least one year for the migrant to pay back his first loan. Only in the second year can he begin to save money. The average length of stay recorded in one camp in 2008 was four years (Bruslé 2010).

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introducing a rupture—a positive one in Nepal, not a negative one as a migrant—in predetermined life paths.

These objectives are most certainly family-oriented and are aimed at triumphing over a subsistence economy. Apart from a few youngsters, migration is not an individual affair but is rooted at the meso level, as advocated by Faist (1997) or Cohen and Sirkeci (2011) who have attempted to understand the phenomenon. The case of H.J. illustrates this well:

> I had been a taxi driver in Jhapa [a district in the plains of east Nepal] for two months. I had a passport made. A friend of mine told me that there were good jobs abroad. I did not earn much money. I had always heard that 'abroad one can earn good money (*ramro paisa*) and jobs are available (*kam hunchha*)'. I saw that the others were earning money. They were sending money home, they were buying land, building houses. It was also my dream (*sapana*). I was wondering if I could do it or not, but I had to go there once. "How is a foreign country?" (*kasto rahechha bidesh?*), I kept asking myself. "I'm going there only once and with the money, I can do something in Nepal," I thought. With that in mind, I came here.

NARRATIVES, SUFFERING, AND THE CULTURE OF MIGRATION

The question of the heuristic value of migrants' discourses has been discussed and often ignored in the construction of migration theories (Bakewell 2010). However, approaches by Cohen, both alone (2004) and with Sirkeci (2011), and, among others, by Ali (2007), Horvath (2008), and Kandel and Massey (2002), have proved useful for understanding migration dynamics and values because they take migrants' own perspectives seriously. Viewing migration in peasant society not as something exceptional but rather as "simply movement, nothing more or less" (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011: xi) shows that migration is a major component of human life. The vocabulary of migration, along with the behaviour of returnees, tells a story of how migration prevails as a social fact in almost all aspects of life in Nepal. "The structure of migration, its history, and the continuity that characterizes movements past and present for most sending communities creates a 'culture of migration' that supports movers and non-movers

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and facilitates network building between origin and destination populations" (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011: 116). I argue that the making of a culture of migration is also about the creation, the maintenance, and the propagation of a normative discourse about mobility itself. What is striking is that these mindsets, these meanings of migration, are widespread in society at large, in newspapers as well as in the interviews that I recorded with migrants.[11]

The recurrence of these discourses in diverse contexts constitutes a general ideology which makes sense of a culture of migration. They may be related to the "Nepali literature of leaving", described by Hutt (1998), in which the pain (*dukha*) of exile is a central theme. In the novel *Basai* (1957–8), by Lila Bahadur Kshetri, the fate of the hero, Dhane, "is beset with calamities from the start" (Hutt 1998: 197), stuck between his poverty and moneylenders. He has no choice but to flee to India. The continuity of the discourse between novels written in the 1930s and eighty years later in young Nepali migrants' stories is striking. The experience abroad, however painful (*dukhi*) it may be, is not described as exceptional but as being integrated, along with agriculture, in most life stories. The atmosphere of departure permeates all rural and urban Nepali households and, as described for Hyderabad by Ali (2007), is an ancient powerful context that makes migration an implicit and pervasive part of life. Labour migration is thus entrenched in Nepalese society both vertically (migration has a history) and horizontally (migration affects the majority of men between the ages of 20 and 45). When asked about his situation in a Qatari *labour camp*, Santosh K. replied: "Our life is the one of *pardeshi* (foreigner), we have to endure (*sahanu*) whatever happens to us." As for Nepali migrants, the act of leaving Nepal to work is nothing out of the ordinary: "Today it's a normal (*svabhavik*) thing to long to work in Europe." No one rises in revolt against migration because it's neither a new nor an exceptional phenomenon: "That's life" (*estai ho jindagi*).

[11] A young man interviewed in the *Nepali Times* (552, May 2011) states: "*bideshinu rahar hoina, badhyata ho*" (Going abroad is not a desire, it's an obligation). The journalist then rightly states: "That is the general refrain up and down the line: we don't like to go abroad, we are forced to."

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Far from the decision to migrate being a single, one-off decision based either on desire or on obligation, it is in fact entrenched in a continuous, ongoing set of decisions, strategies, and culture that affect entire households. A certain degree of freedom exists when men decide to migrate so that it is difficult to assert that the decision was made under duress (whether economic or psychological).[12] One may be forced to leave one's family due to financial constraints and still choose certain aspects of one's trip abroad. The choice may concern the destination (India, Malaysia, the Gulf), the manpower agency, the broker, or the scheduled period of time abroad. It is therefore difficult for researchers to decide when obligation stops and when desire begins, or the other way around. As one young man plainly said: if he wanted to buy a motorcycle, he *had* to go abroad to earn the required amount of money. Is having a motorcycle vital, very necessary, or superfluous? Thus conceptualized, obligation and choice are thoroughly relative concepts that need to be contextualized in relation to economic and cultural values. This remark brings out the fact that migration is an implicit part of life. The question then is not "Should I leave or not?" but "Where and how shall I do it?"

Portraying the meaning of migration obliges the migrant to use categories that may not actually operate when the decision itself is taken, if taken at all. Hence, the notion of the level of aspirations related to migration (Czaika and Vothknecht 2010) is useful when trying to fully understand the desire versus obligation dualism. Without casting any moral value on migrants' behaviour, one may admit that men and families may have different ambitions. Some are willing to take risks or invest in order to accumulate wealth, while others are more cautious. Evaluating the often psychological factors is beyond the scope of this article and the proficiency of the author. Yet each migrant has a migratory project which reflects his individual—and his household's—strategy that evolves during the years spent abroad. On achieving his basic needs, the successful migrant who has managed to move up to a better job and salary, can see his way forward and

[12] This is particularly the case in Qatar or in the Gulf which are expensive destinations. Travel costs make them inaccessible to the poorest who cannot raise a mortgage to secure a loan.

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decide whether to send his children to a better school, to transfer his Nepali residence into town, and so on. Strategies adopted by migrants change, which in turn change the meaning of migration. Work abroad can still be described as a compulsion, but at the same time higher goals can also be achieved.

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Most Nepalis in Qatar highlight the fact that migration derives from constraints, as something inevitable that they simply have to do. They underline the prevalence of obligations that act like an all-encompassing force which leads the migrant to do something that is, all at the same time, a duty, painful, and sometimes a source of shame. The meaning attached to the act of migrating is marked by a set of images that seldom refer to freedom or choice. It is as if there was indeed no choice but to leave Nepal. But this very notion of 'non-choice' carries different meanings according to migrants' economic, social, familial, or psychological circumstances. The fixed and reified reference categories used by Nepalis and expressed in prevailing discourses to explain their migration have to be seen as being relative and for that matter can be overstepped by studying migration objectives. Whether a desire or an obligation, the aim of migration is still rooted in individual and household strategies regarding the future.

What this case study shows is that, by reiterating the meaning of migration, Nepali migrants are in keeping with a larger history of movement beyond the Nepalese borders which affects all villages. The prevalence of a stereotyped discourse creates the feeling of a common destiny. Often men do not tell their personal story using the first person 'I' (*ma*) but 'we' (*hami*), underlying the supposed shared fate of all Nepali migrants and thus building a migration ideology. The challenge facing migration theories is to integrate this migration ideology into other factors, not to simply ignore it. Grassroots discourses fit into a broader culture of migration ideology. Heuristically speaking, although migrants do have a self-centred point of view—not all dimensions of migration are understood—the meaning attached to migration represents ways to decipher a culture of migration and to understand the latter as a "migration-facilitating feedback mechanism" in origin communities (de Haas 2010: 1612). Discourses are

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part of the predisposing factors that influence and perpetuate a migration system. A dominant, pervasive, and almost official discourse has emerged which focuses on obligation and constraint. The subjectivity of the actors in migration is erased by this discourse, and this very fact reflects the shame and difficulties of migration. However, this discourse should not erase other subjectivities expressed by migrants who put forward their agency and thus consciously reclaim their subjectivity. All the words and expressions used by migrants, their families and the media show how this social fact which, far from being marginal or only a last-resort strategy, lies at the very heart of Nepalese social dynamics. The meanings of migration may therefore be linked to social changes (Portes 2010) in that social expectations can be fulfilled and performed through migration.

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10

TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS IN NEPALI ORGANIZATIONS IN NEW YORK

Susan Hangen

ON A HUMID DAY IN June 2013, several hundred people gathered in front of a stage on a plaza in Jackson Heights, Queens, to participate in the most visible public event that the Nepali community had ever sponsored in New York: the first Nepal Mela (festival). Though the audience was comprised primarily of Nepali immigrants, the event was also a way for Nepalis to claim public space and thus generate awareness of their existence as a community among the broader population in Queens. Billed as a parade, the central event at the festival was a procession of numerous organizations across the stage, accompanied by a Newar musical group (*panche baja*). As the master of ceremony announced the name of each organization, the representatives of the organization carried a banner with the organization's name onto the stage, and waved or danced while the crowd applauded. The 13 participating organizations represented Nepali ethnic groups such as the Kirat Rai Society, political organizations such as the Nepal Janasamparka Samiti, and professional associations such as the Association of Nepali Physicians in America. This procession demonstrated the centrality of organizations in the social life of Nepali

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immigrants in New York, and the role of organizations in serving as the public face of the Nepali community.

Since 2000 the Nepali population in New York City has expanded rapidly. In 2002 there were few signs of the Nepali community in public spaces; by 2013 there were dozens of Nepali-owned and oriented businesses, seven media outlets, and at least 70 Nepali organizations in New York City. In this paper, I examine some of the transnational activities that are channelled through these Nepali organizations. By participating in these activities, immigrants try to engage in and influence happenings in Nepal and simultaneously create a sense of belonging in New York. I show that social structures and political trends in Nepal influence the formation, orientation, and dissolution of these organizations and the debates that take place within and between them. While people can forge close ties with other people from their home country by participating in these organizations, they also often find themselves embroiled in conflicts due to differences over political goals and ideologies within the community. The organizational life of the Nepali diaspora in New York is thus marked by contention as much as by solidarity, as Gellner (2015) similarly found in his study of Nepali associations in the UK.

My data in this chapter comes from two main sources. *First*, I conducted an action-research project on the Nepali community in New York City as part of a team spearheaded by the Nepali organization, Adhikaar (Hangen and Ranjit 2010). The research team surveyed 300 members of the Nepali community about their migration experiences and their lives in New York. We held four focus-group discussions, and I also carried out twelve interviews as part of this project. *Second*, I engaged in participant observation while living in New York from 2003 onwards, witnessing the evolution of the Nepali community over a decade. Participant observation involved attending dozens of public meetings and celebrations sponsored by a wide range of Nepali organizations. I also conducted ten formal interviews, outside of the scope of the Adhikaar project, and held many informal conversations with key participants in these organizations.

IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS AND TRANSNATIONALISM

The role that immigrant associations play in the 'political incorporation' of migrants into the dominant society has been a major focus

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in studies of international migration. Studies of associations have led scholars to recognize that migrants can maintain and create distinctive identities and communities while also becoming part of the dominant society. Migrants can be engaged in multiple social and political fields simultaneously (Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Thus, immigrant associations are oriented both towards the social and political contexts of the country of origin and the country of settlement (Levitt et al. 2003; Odmalm 2004; Østergaard-Nielsen 2006; Owusu 2000). Transnational political activities are not mutually exclusive with engagement in the local and can be a path for political incorporation into the new society (Østergaard-Nielsen 2009). Terms such as 'bifocality' (Vertovec 2007) and 'simultaneity' (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Pessar and Graham 2001) capture this concept of the dual orientation of migrants towards both home and host countries.

Much of this literature on the political incorporation of migrants in their new societies distinguishes between homeland-oriented activities, which are labelled 'transnational', and host country-oriented activities, which aim to address the needs and interests of migrants in their new context, and are marked as 'local'. However, the conceptual distinction between the transnational and the local appears less clear when we examine the practices and discourse of immigrant organizations. In this study of the Nepali organizations in New York, I found that the categories of the local and the transnational frequently overlapped in their activities. Most of the Nepali organizations in New York utilize and reimagine social categories that primarily hold meaning with reference to the context of Nepal. Debates, conflicts, and emerging identities in Nepal shape the local concerns of the associations in New York.

This phenomenon cannot be explained merely as the result of immigrants' nostalgic efforts to recreate the homeland in the diaspora. Rather, for these migrants, social and political contexts are merged across space, so that people never wholly leave the context of their home society. Other scholars have noted the elasticity of social space for migrants. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) talk about social fields of the diaspora and Levitt (2001) describes Dominican migrants in Boston as weaving their original and new residences into a single transnational village. In the context of my research, this social field appeared to me as 'the Nepal bubble effect', as, regardless of their

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actual geographic location, Nepalis can experience the sense of being encompassed within a Nepali social space, with fluid, permeable, and transparent walls.

Transnational political activities are not a new phenomenon. Nancy Foner (2005) demonstrates how Eastern European Jewish and Italian migrants were actively involved in homeland politics in the early twentieth century. Yet she notes that transnational politics have intensified for immigrants, due to both the technological advancements of the twenty-first century, and the solidification of nationalist ideologies in their home states (Foner 2005: 74). Political transnationalism has become heightened as time and space are increasingly compressed by technology, allowing migrants to participate in emerging political events and crises immediately.

While transnational political activities are widespread among contemporary migrants, there are variations in the extent to which migrants engage in these activities and in the particular forms of transnational politics that emerge in migrant communities. Sociologists Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller (2003) argue that these variations are linked to structural conditions that affect these migrant groups, such as the migration history of the groups, and the extent of democratization and the forms of political organizations in the sending states. In their comparative study of immigrant groups from the Dominican Republic, Colombia, and El Salvador, they found that Dominicans living abroad have voting rights, and therefore their transnational political activities are largely focused on interacting with political parties in their home countries. By contrast, most Salvadorans left their country because of political violence and engage with their hometowns and regions rather than with political parties or the state directly (Guarnizo et al. 2003: 1220). The extent of political freedom in the destination country also shapes or limits the extent to which migrants can engage in political mobilization. Thus, if we are to understand the specific transnational practices that emerge within a migrant community, we must acknowledge the broader structural features that form the context of migration, both in the sending and the destination states.

In a similar vein, Keiko Yamanaka (2007) emphasizes the significance of the conditions of migration in her analysis of the associational life of Nepali immigrants in the Tokai region of Japan. She links the robust number of Nepali immigrant organizations there to

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the immigration history of this community. In order to migrate to Japan and find jobs, Nepali migrants "depended on social networks and social capital based on kinship and community ties" (Yamanaka 2007: 420). By contrast, Brazilian immigrants established relatively few organizations in Japan; unlike Nepalis, they used brokers to secure visas and work in Japan, and thus relied less on social capital than Nepali migrants. Yamanaka also demonstrates how social movements in Nepal influence the formation of Nepali organizations in Japan (Yamanaka 2007: 431).

Applying these insights to the case of Nepali organizations in New York, we can see how the conditions of migration influence the types of associations that Nepalis create in New York. Nepalis arrived in New York primarily through networks rather than through labour brokers, which sustains their interest in maintaining social networks. Furthermore, most Nepali migrants to the USA were members of the middle class in Nepal and many were involved in political and social organizations in their home country (Hangen and Ranjit 2010). Thus, their inclination to engage in organizations in the USA likely stems from their experience in participation in civil society and political organizations in Nepal.

It is also evident that the political processes and social structures of Nepal inform the categories that people in New York invoke in their associational activities, and the conflicts that emerge between different social groups of Nepali immigrants. The forms of transnational political activities that Nepali immigrants create are linked to changes in the Nepali political sphere. In particular, these activities reflect the democratization of the Nepali state since the 1990s, and the extensive network of social movements and political parties that have mushroomed there since then. In her study of Nepali students in the USA, Bandita Sijapati (this volume, p. 256), similarly finds that "Nepali immigrant communities' imagined identities are inextricably tied to changes in the home country".

MIGRATION FROM NEPAL TO THE USA

The US stands as one of the most desirable destinations for Nepalis seeking to migrate abroad. Fewer Nepalis migrate to the USA than to the Gulf region, Southeast Asian countries, or the UK, primarily

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because of restrictive immigration policies.[1] Despite this, Nepalis have migrated to the USA in increasing numbers during the past decade. Of the 300 individuals who responded to the Adhikaar survey, 85 per cent arrived in New York after 2001, and almost half arrived after 2007. According to the 2010 US Census, there are 59,490 Nepalis in the United States, with 5,681 residing in New York City, the location with the largest concentration of Nepalis. Some Nepali organizations in the USA such as Adhikaar and the Association of Nepalis in the Americas (ANA), assert that the official statistics significantly under-represent the actual population, and claim that there are tens of thousands of Nepalis in NYC alone. Immigration data from the US government suggest that the population of Nepalis is probably higher than the 2010 census figure: between 2006 and 2010, a total of 87,890 Nepali citizens entered the United States on non-immigrant visas, primarily on tourist or student visas.[2] Anecdotally, we know that many Nepalis who enter as non-immigrants do not return to Nepal. Furthermore, between 2004 and 2010, there were 39,129 people born in Nepal who obtained lawful permanent resident status.

The Adhikaar survey findings indicate that many of the Nepali immigrants to the United States were part of the middle class in Nepal. Almost all migrated to the USA from Kathmandu. Over half of the Nepalis surveyed were in professional or business occupations when they lived in Nepal. Thirty per cent had attained a bachelor's degree or postgraduate degree before arriving in New York, making them much better educated than most Nepalis (Hangen and Ranjit 2010).

However, as is the case for many new immigrants, it is challenging for Nepali immigrants to find work in US that is comparable to their occupations in Nepal. Their cultural capital does not transfer

[1] The United States lacks an extensive temporary labour visa programme and requires individuals who apply for tourist visas or business visas to demonstrate that they have substantial ties to Nepal that would ensure their return. For applicants to meet this requirement, they must generally show significant resources and employment that would be equivalent to at least a middle-class status in Nepal.

[2] In 2010, a total of 18,537 Nepalis entered the United States, including 10,038 on tourist/visitor visas, 5,251 on student visas, 1,603 temporary workers and their family members, and 747 diplomats (Homeland 2010).

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to USA. Many have low proficiency in English, and lack job contacts in the professional sector. Their educational credentials from Nepal or India are often not recognized or valued by US employers.[3] In New York they have access primarily to low-prestige service-sector jobs and thus experience downward class mobility. Most Nepali women in New York work as domestic workers or in nail salons while men typically work as taxi drivers or in the restaurant industry. These low-wage jobs can be secured quickly, which appeals to migrants because many have borrowed or spent considerable sums to get to the USA. More than two thirds of the individuals surveyed work over 40 hours a week, and two thirds report that their household incomes are US$30,000 or less per year.[4] A former major in the Nepali army who was working as a busboy in an Indian restaurant in Manhattan explained the change in his status to me, quipping, "This is why we say that USA stands for You Start Again!"

Those who attend college in the United States are more likely to find jobs in the professional sector, but many Nepalis who begin college drop out before completing their degrees. In order to receive student visas, they must prove that they are able to cover their expenses in the US, and thus inflate their financial resources in their visa applications. They begin working to pay for college, and eventually find it impossible to keep up with the demands of their courses. Some students drop out of college when they realize that they have the opportunity to earn larger salaries than they could earn in Nepal even without completing college (Sijapati 2011).

Nepali migrants in New York are engaged in transnational activity in multiple ways, as Sijpati (2009–10) has demonstrated for Nepali students in the USA. She shows that organizations are just one of a

3 Several respondents with college degrees from outside the United States were employed in working-class jobs.

4 Nepalis who have the legal right to work and those who are undocumented or overstayed tourist visas were roughly equally represented in the survey and the majority of both groups said that they faced challenges in securing good jobs. Few respondents to our survey were willing to specify their exact occupation in New York; we believe this is primarily because these jobs are lower in prestige than their occupations in Nepal and they felt uncomfortable revealing these jobs to the Nepali survey team.

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number of "fluid and concentric social fields" in which transnationalism takes place across, alongside core ties of kinship and community, residential enclaves, and workplaces, and diffuse ties in the public domain (Sijapati 2009–10: 140). While transnational activities take many forms, organizations play a prominent role in the lives of many Nepali immigrants.

Participation in Nepali organizations is fairly high among Nepalis in New York. Of the 300 respondents to Adhikaar's survey, more than one third belong to at least one Nepali organization in New York. Nearly two thirds attend the numerous social and cultural events in the community. These events are held several times a week, particularly on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon, and include celebrations of major holidays, presentations, interactions with visiting Nepali politicians, and cultural performances sponsored by the social or political organizations. Far more men than women attend these events, except for when the events are targeted at women. One man who is a president of one organization, a core committee member of another, and an active participant in a third, discussed the downside of this dynamic public sphere: there are too many organizations, too many programmes going on every weekend, and it is difficult to find time to go to them and still get household chores done. I now provide an overview of the organizations that are engaged in transnational political activities.

THE SCOPE OF NEPALI ORGANIZATIONS IN NEW YORK

Many of the Nepali organizations in New York City facilitate transnational political interactions between Nepali immigrants and the numerous and vivacious political parties and social movements that emerged in Nepal after 1990. Many offer ways for migrants to participate in Nepali politics, through engaging in political parties, contributing to political debates, and interacting with non-state actors, such as social movement organizations. These forms of transnational political activity exist among other communities of international migrants throughout the world, as many studies have shown (Itzigsohn 2000; Østergaard-Nielsen 2006).

There are several major categories of Nepali organizations in New York that engage in transnational political activities: (i) pan-Nepal

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organizations; (ii) ethnic and regional identity-based organizations; and (iii) political issue and political party-based organizations. Other organizations promote a range of interests, including Nepali literature, music, and social welfare (for example, organizing blood drives); but they are not clearly involved in transnational politics.

The category of 'pan-Nepali' organizations includes organizations that were founded in the 1980s, and are the oldest Nepali organizations in the United States. As cultural organizations, they have aimed to represent Nepalis to the dominant group in the US and to preserve Nepali culture and identity. These organizations, such as the America-Nepal Friendship Society (ANFS) and the Association of Nepalis in the Americas exemplify what Das Gupta (2006: 9) calls "place-taking politics": these are elite-centred organizations that attempt to make a place for the new immigrant group within the dominant society. They started by focusing on cultural preservation and creating networks within what was a relatively small community of Nepali immigrants. The major event sponsored by ANFS is the annual banquet celebration of the Nepali New Year in April, which according to the organization's website, is "part of ANFS's long tradition in preserving and promoting Nepali culture and tradition in the United States of America".[5]

Some Nepalis in New York view these organizations as dominated by elite and high-caste Hindus, a perspective that is not unfounded since the executive committee of ANFS is composed entirely of Bahuns, Chhetris, and Newars. Since 2010, these pan-Nepali organizations have become more involved in transnational politics, joining the movement led by the global Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) to pressure the Nepali state to grant dual-citizenship, or "continuity of Nepali citizenship" to Non-Resident Nepalis (Chapter 18 in this volume). The NRN National Coordination Council of USA was founded in 2010 and a chapter now operates in New York. As discussed below, this organization's efforts to engage the Nepali community in New York in the process of providing feedback for the constitution-writing process in Nepal was controversial.

In the second category are organizations that are founded on the basis of ethnic or regional identities. By 2012, they comprised 19 of the

5 Available at: www.anfsusa.org.

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35 organizations that were active in New York. Examples of organizations representing indigenous nationalities include the Tamu Society USA and the United Kirat Rai Organization of America. Other organizations represent different marginalized groups such as the Association of Nepalese Taraian in America (ANTA), which represents Madheshis, and the Nepali-American Society for Oppressed Community (NASO), a Dalit organization. Some organizations represent districts or regions in Nepal, such as the Mustang Kyidung or the US Mugum Welfare Association. FIPNA, the Federation of the Indigenous Peoples of Nepal in America, composed of members from the indigenous nationalities organizations that exist in New York, is discussed further below.

These ethnic and regional organizations serve multiple purposes. First, they parallel the kinds of mutual aid society or hometown association that rural to urban and international migrants have long set up in their new localities, as ways of creating quasi-kinship-like ties of support in contexts in which actual kin are sparse (Foner 2005; Freedman 1960; Skeldon 1980). Second, both the ethnic and regionally based organizations claim to be primarily concerned with cultural preservation. Third, the categories that are named and mobilized in these organizations are also the basis of the main identity movements that have become increasingly prominent in Nepal. The concept of forming an organization based on a Taraian identity reflects the rise of the Madheshi movement in Nepal.

Many of these organizations are involved in transnational political activities, such as raising and sending money to support activities in Nepal. The Tamu (Gurung) Society of America, which I have discussed at length elsewhere (Hangen 2014), is an excellent example of a New York-based organization that is engaged in the indigenous nationalities movement in Nepal. This organization supported the activities of Gurung organizations in Nepal by contributing about US$1,400 to a conference of the Gurung (Tamu) National Coordination Council in Nepal. The Tamu Society also allows Gurungs in New York to be visible as a community to Gurung political representatives who visit from Nepal, and thus Gurungs in New York can attempt to influence politics in Nepal through them. For example, when two Gurung politicians, Dev Gurung, a minister in the Maoist government and a member of the central committee of the Maoist party, and Sita Gurung, a Constituent Assembly member from the Nepali Congress party, visited

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New York in April 2008, the Tamu Society sponsored a series of public presentations and small dinner gatherings so that their members could interact with these leaders. Leaders of the Tamu Society explained that these events served as a way of educating Gurungs in New York about current political issues in Nepal, and thus keeping them connected to Nepal. At these events, many conversations concerned the progress and challenges of the indigenous nationalities movement and the position of Gurungs in Nepali society. The representatives of the Tamu Society would not be able to gain access to these leaders so easily in Nepal, where more people compete for their attention.

The third category of organization focuses on Nepali political issues beyond the mobilization of ethnic/regional identity: some are 'sister' organizations (*bhratri sangathan*) of prominent Nepali political parties. The Jana Samparka Samiti is affiliated with Nepali Congress and the UNDF is affiliated with the CPN-UML: both raise funds for party candidates in elections and hold interaction programmes with leaders from Nepal. Other organizations in this category lobby the state to grant dual-citizenship rights to NRNs, respond to particular political events in Nepal, or advance specific causes such as human rights issues in Nepal. The Alliance for Democracy and Human Rights in Nepal (ADHRN), discussed further below, is one example of this type of organization.

Next, I examine several shifts in the organizational landscape in the Nepali community that have occurred over the last few years. These shifts took place in response to political and social changes in Nepal and to events in New York. The three cases that I discuss show how political events in Nepal influence forms of transnationalism among Nepali organizations in New York, and illustrate the blurring of the local and the transnational activities in practice. These cases also show how conflicts emerge within these organizations, and how plans for building community can quickly become controversial and lead to social fractures.

THE ALLIANCE FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN NEPAL

Organizations in New York wax and wane with changes in the political situation in Nepal and in the constellation of other organizations

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in New York, as the fate of the Alliance for Democracy and Human Rights in Nepal (ADHRN) illustrates. Founded in 1989, before the first People's Movement that resulted in multiparty democracy in Nepal, ADHRN emerged as a leader in public life in the Nepali community in New York during the Maoist armed conflict in Nepal. The organization sought to call attention to and end the human rights abuses that were taking place during the conflict. When the King of Nepal suspended democracy in 2005, ADHRN organized protests to reinstate democracy, echoing the extensive protests in Nepal that were organized by members of 'civil society' there. ADHRN raised about US$7,000 for victims of human rights abuses in Nepal during that time. It remained active through the Second People's Movement of 2006 but after 2008, with the end of the conflict and the election of a Constituent Assembly, the organization became dormant. It still exists, and has a website and executive committee, but it has held no significant public events in recent years.

A former leader of the organization, a high-caste Hindu man, discussed how the demise of ADHRN followed larger political shifts in Nepal. After he became the president, he attempted to bring women and individuals from different ethnic groups into the organization, and tried to refocus the organization on the issues of marginalized peoples in Nepal. He had long been frustrated with the lack of diversity among the participants in ADHRN, who were primarily high-caste men. Nonetheless, he was not able to revitalize the organization. As he explained,

> ADHRN was pretty active during the movement in Nepal. However it slowed down after the movement was over ... I wanted to focus more on rights of the different ethnic groups, women and Dalits. However, it did not work. At the same time, many ethnic organizations came onto the scene. This made the Alliance less important and people started giving less attention to activities that we used to organize. It was then that I stopped working actively for the Alliance.

The path of ADHRN mirrors the trajectory of the human rights movement in the mid-2000s in Nepal: following the widespread popular participation in the 2006 People's Movement, and after the release of the Interim Constitution, identity politics emerged as one of the most significant issues and sources of conflict, as marginalized

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groups demanded assurances that their issues would be addressed. With its history as a high-caste Hindu-dominated group, and with its high-caste leadership, ADHRN could not transform itself into a legitimate advocate for marginalized group-oriented human rights. As discussed below, in 2009, ADHRN did join a short-lived coalition of organizations representing marginalized groups. However, it did not fully revive the organization and other organizations representing the ethnic and regional identity groups increasingly came to be the primary voices for human rights issues, defined primarily as identity rights issues. This case demonstrates how changes in Nepal can affect the political challenges that Nepali organizations face within the New York community, and indeed the very relevance of these organizations in the diaspora.

THE FEDERATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF NEPAL AND THE NEPAL GHAR CONTROVERSY

The second case I look at is the Federation of Indigenous Peoples of Nepal in America (FIPNA), founded in 2008. This organization is directly connected to the indigenous nationalities (*Adivasi janajati* or *janajati*) movement in Nepal, which mobilizes about 60 culturally diverse marginalized ethnic groups to gain greater representation within the state and to end the dominance of high-caste Hindus in the country. In New York FIPNA was founded as a coalition of about twelve organizations that represent different Nepali indigenous nationalities or regions such as Mustang and Walung. FIPNA aims to replicate the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), the organization that has been the main engine of the Janajati movement in Nepal. Although there is no official link between FIPNA and NEFIN, FIPNA representatives consulted with NEFIN members when creating their by-laws, and FIPNA hosts talk programmes for members of NEFIN when they visit New York. Yamanaka (2007) notes that a similar organization called the Nepalese Indigenous People's Association formed in Tokai, Japan, around the year 2000. Like FIPNA, it was comprised of all of the Janajati organizations that existed in that area.

FIPNA was founded around the time of the Constituent Assembly elections of 2008. FIPNA's emergence reflects the increasingly

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significant and politicized role of the Janajati movement in Nepal following the Second People's Movement of 2006. New York Nepalis launched FIPNA when Parsuram Tamang, a prominent Janajati activist from Nepal, visited New York for the annual meeting of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples. This activist talked to the leaders of some of the organizations in New York about the role that they could play in the forthcoming election in Nepal.

FIPNA illustrates the "simultaneity" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) that characterizes much immigrant organizing, as the organization responds both to the transnational and local contexts. FIPNA members said that they aimed to provide a forum for Janajatis in New York to learn about and debate the issues facing Janajatis in Nepal, most significantly the restructuring of the Nepali state. Indeed, the organization has held numerous interaction programmes with Janajati scholars and political leaders. But FIPNA members also see the organization as playing a role in addressing ethnic inequality within the Nepali community in New York. High-caste Nepali immigrants have minimal economic or political power over Janajati immigrants in New York; nonetheless, Janajatis perceive that patterns of social inequality that were established in Nepal continue to influence social interactions in New York. Specifically, they feel that high-caste Hindus continue to try to dominate them in public forums in the USA. This sentiment was evident in the Janajati responses to an effort to establish a pan-Nepali cultural centre.

Conversations about starting a federation of Janajati organizations in New York began in 2004 in response to the efforts of a group of high-caste Hindu men to launch effort to build a 'Nepal Ghar' (Nepal House) in New York. This was the first time that Janajati organizations were pulled together in New York. The Nepal Ghar was envisioned as a community and cultural centre for Nepalis in New York, a home for Nepalis away from Nepal and a physical manifestation of Nepal abroad. The Nepal Ghar organizers invited representatives of Janajati organizations to a meeting and presented these organizations with their plan. To the dismay of those invited to the meeting, the organizers had already appointed individuals to various committees and posts. Janajati leaders were furious that they were not consulted earlier in the process and that the Nepal Ghar organizers assumed that they would accept the overall concept and their assigned roles.

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The Janajati organizations quickly called a separate meeting. The general consensus was that the high-caste Hindus had included them as an afterthought, in an effort to make the Nepal Ghar project appear to be endorsed by all Nepalis. Nine leaders of Janajati organizations wrote a letter to the main Nepal Ghar organizer, stating that they would not participate unless they had a chance to review a proper proposal and to have their ideas included in the planning process. Some of the Janajati leaders said that the failure of the high-caste leaders to consult with them reminded them of the way that the Nepali state had treated their people during the Panchayat era. The Janajatis were not willing to contribute to a representation of the Nepali nation that was controlled by high-caste Hindus. The Nepal Ghar project was abandoned and has not resurfaced.

FIPNA was launched in New York only several years after the controversy over the Nepal Ghar plan. But the incident loomed large in the memories of the Janajati leaders in New York as a clear example of the persistence of high-caste Hindu dominance in the diaspora. As one Gurung leader explained to me, the Nepal Ghar incident "was the basis for talking about whether or not we needed a Janajati Mahasangh here in New York". The decision to create FIPNA emerged in response to this local experience as well as in response to the changing political circumstances in Nepal, when the Janajati movement took on heightened importance during the 2008 Constituent Assembly elections.

THE CONSTITUTION RECOMMENDATIONS CONTROVERSY AND THE COALITION ADVANCING THE RIGHTS OF MARGINALIZED PEOPLES OF NEPAL

In February 2009, Dr Tara Niraula, a longstanding leader of the America Nepal Friendship Society in New York and active member of the NRNA's National Coordination Council, sent out a mass email in English, addressed to NRN America Community Leaders and Members. In the email, he appealed to 'Non-Resident Nepalis' to participate in Nepal's constitution-making process. He attached a five-page questionnaire, developed by the Constitution Recommendation Committee of the Non-Resident Nepalese Association's International Coordination Council (NRNA-ICC), and urged "everyone to participate

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in this important project" by completing the form and submitting it to the NRNA committee by the deadline, a month later.

Many of the Nepali organization leaders in New York who received the email responded with anger. They felt that soliciting feedback from Nepalis in the USA via a lengthy and impersonal email survey was "inadequate" and unlikely to produce substantial participation from people from marginalized communities. In addition, they viewed the email as another example of the efforts of high-caste Hindus to control the political process in Nepal, even from afar.

In response, several weeks later, leaders from five different organizations decided to form a new organization called The Coalition Advancing the Rights of Marginalized Peoples of Nepal. The five organizations were Adhikaar for Human Rights and Social Justice, Alliance for Democracy and Human Rights in Nepal (ADHRN), Association of Nepali Teraian in America (ANTA), Federation of Indigenous Peoples of Nepal in America (FIPNA), and the NASO, representing Dalits. Their initial aim was to solicit suggestions for the constitution making process, thus replicating the NRNA-ICC's efforts. But they also voiced vague plans about creating public dialogue about the issues facing Nepal's marginalized peoples.

At an organizing meeting, the members criticized the audacity of the NRNA-ICC plan. One Gurung man commented: "They didn't involve everyone—they can't and don't represent all Nepalis abroad." Another man asserted the benefits of organizing through the new Coalition, which would serve the purpose of "representing many of the groups who are often overlooked in Nepal" and sending a strong message to the state and the NRN organizers that "marginalized groups agree on many issues".

The Coalition released a press statement, announcing the main impetus for its formation:

> [W]ith the Constitutional Assembly now ten months behind schedule, and with increasing polarization in almost all aspects of Nepali society, and conflicting statements by leaders in and outside of Nepal, observers are beginning to raise serious concerns about the process of drafting of the new constitution. Specifically, there have been doubts about the process' effectiveness in addressing the needs and aspirations of marginalized communities ... who constitute the majority population in Nepal. (Coalition 2009)

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In the press release, the Coalition positioned itself as being more "genuine" and "inclusive" than the NRNA effort. It aimed to, "advocate for genuine consultations with Nepalis of all caste, creed, class, religion, and gender in the drafting of the new constitution to establish an inclusive democracy for ALL Nepali peoples" (Coalition 2009; emphasis in original).

The Coalition scheduled what they hoped would be the first of a series of public discussions and "interaction programs" to inform Nepalis in New York about the issues at stake in the new constitution, and to solicit feedback. This event was fairly well attended with about 40 people in the room; typically for this kind of forum, all but five participants were men. Over the course of three hours, representatives from the five member organizations made presentations to the audience about their concerns regarding the new constitution. But, as was the case for many of the Nepali organization events I observed, interaction between audience members and presenters was limited. While the Coalition had touted its plans to create a participatory forum, it allotted only half an hour for audience discussion. Several months later, the Coalition disbanded, partly because some members were angry that this public forum had failed to reach a diverse audience, and partly because it became clear that the member organizations did not in fact agree on what specific recommendations should be made to the Constituent Assembly.

Like the Nepal Ghar project launched several years earlier, the NRNA Constitution Committee's plan was an effort to mobilize Nepalis as a whole, and likewise representatives of marginalized groups critiqued it strongly. The email, with its clear directives, and the NRNA's overall effort to facilitate input into the constitution-writing process, was interpreted as a strategy to undermine the ability of people from 'marginalized communities' to represent themselves. Individuals from the organizations that formed the Coalition did not trust a Bahun man or the pan-Nepali organization to accurately represent their interests. They did not want to grant them the power to convey their input on the future of the Nepali state. In the response to the NRNA and in the formation of the Coalition, the anger and frustration that marginalized groups feel towards the Nepali state was reignited in New York and redirected towards an organization that was taken as an approximation of the state. Thus, this case exemplifies the blurring

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of local and transnational dimensions of organizations in New York: a Nepali immigrant residing in New York sent an email launching a transnational political activity, which sparked the mobilization and brief formation of a new organization in New York. Although one of the key goals of the Coalition was to provide a channel for transnational political activity, the activities that it carried out had political and social effects primarily within New York.

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In each of these cases of organization politics in the Nepali community in New York, transnational and local social spheres are merged. All three cases involve transnational politics. Nepali immigrants aimed to make political interventions in Nepal, to support the indigenous nationalities movement or the democracy movement, or to participate in the constitution-writing process. In all three cases, these transnational political activities had effects not just in Nepal but also in the Nepali community in New York. The dynamics of relations between different social groups in New York played a significant role in the emergence of two organizations, FIPNA and the Coalition Advancing the Rights of Marginalized Peoples of Nepal.

These cases also demonstrate that the debates about identity politics in Nepal increasingly shape the conversations and activities of Nepali organizations in New York. Organizations form and wane due to events in the political sphere in Nepal as well as in New York. The three examples involve controversies that centred on tensions between high-caste Hindu leaders and leaders from marginalized communities. Debates about how the new state should be formed and the role of various ethnic groups within the nation played out in the Nepali community in New York, providing evidence of the lack of a distinct boundary between Nepal and abroad from the perspective of Nepalis in New York. Much as participation in associational life can bring immigrants camaraderie, recognition, and support, it can equally reflect and sustain social divisions.

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11

IMAGINED SECULARISMS

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE NEPALI DIASPORA

Bandita Sijapati

ONE NOVEMBER EVENING IN 2004 I was with a group of friends and relatives to celebrate a birthday party at a friend's apartment in New York City. In the midst of our merrymaking, I, along with few other females, was called into the inner room. There, a group of women, primarily from Bahun, Chhetri, and Janajati backgrounds, were preparing for *arati* (evening worship including songs of praise to Hindu deities); they requested us to join them in *bhajans* (hymns) and *puja* (prayers). Notwithstanding the awkwardness that some of us felt, not to mention irritation at having to sit through a religious ceremony while the men were outside, enjoying themselves, I was particularly struck by the event itself—that an *arati* was being held, and apparently was held every evening, in an apartment in Queens, New York, where a group of Nepali women congregated to enact their religious and cultural heritage. At the time this seemed unusual and surprising. But, a few years later, when I went back to the same Nepali community to conduct my fieldwork, the equation had changed and the Nepali community itself had been divided between those who continued to uphold the Hindu religion as the

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manifestation of their tradition and values and those who had been 'secularized' following the declaration in 2006, of Nepal, as a secular country.

In the recent literature on diasporic studies, the role religion plays in transnational migration, particularly the ways in which religious identities and practices allow migrants to sustain membership in multiple locations, has been an issue that has received increasing attention. For example, in Chapter 12 in this volume, Craig discusses the everyday religious practices of Mustangis now living in New York in an effort to maintain a sense of well-being and belonging. Likewise, in a broader context, Hamal Gurung (2015) has discussed how 'transnationalism' has helped navigate the 'downward mobility' that professional Nepali women experience in low-status occupations in the informal service and domestic sectors. As Cohen (2008) writes, the heightened scholarly interest in religion in diasporas grew out of the recognition that social, economic, and political life increasingly transcends national borders and cultures, and using elements from various cultures individuals are able to sustain multiple affiliations, identities, and loyalties. Accordingly, social practices around religion in the diaspora have been studied from a variety of perspectives and dimensions—from organizational, through generational, to transnational.[1]

While this existing literature generally tells us a lot about the transformations, particularly religious, that immigrants undergo, it has less to say about the manner in which religious and cultural transformations in the sending country transform the lives of the diaspora, particularly the ways in which they interpret and imagine these changes. In this chapter, using the case of Nepalis, primarily

[1] For the organizational and associational angle, see Bowen (1987), Clarke, Peach, and Vertovec (1990), Rex, Joly, and Wilpert (1987), and Wellmeier (1998). On cultural rights and pluralism, see Vertovec (1999, 2001) and Metcalf (1996). On gender roles, see Willis and Yeoh (2000) and Rayaprol (1997). On generational changes, see Jackson and Nesbitt (1993). For ritual practices, see Gardner (1995), Goldring (1998), Hinnells (1997), Lessinger (1995), Levitt (2003, 2007), and Metcalf (1996). On transnational religious networks, see particularly, Levitt (2001, 2007) and Juergensmeyer (2003).

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youth,[2] who migrated to the United States initially for higher education, I seek to understand how their experiences and learning in the United States influence the ways in which they interpret and imagine the transformation of Nepal from a Hindu monarchy to a secular republic.

THE RESEARCH AND THE CONTEXT

This chapter is part of a larger research project that I undertook intermittently between December 2005 and January 2007 to examine the political socialization of Nepali youths as they mediate between the home and host societies, and the resultant effects on how they relate to political changes in their home country. I focus here on the issue of religion, and I examine the ways in which Nepalis in the United States express, interpret, and imagine the meaning and motifs of secularism in Nepal. These understandings of secularism and its interpretation depend to a large extent, I will argue, on the situational context of Nepalis in the USA, as well as the different transnational ties that individuals have maintained across borders. Also to be noted is that all the interviews were conducted in Nepali with intermittent use of English in between. The quotations from informants are my translations from the original Nepali while those from social media sites are in their original English, which I have not corrected.

The research methodology adopted for this study was primarily based on ethnographic methods and grounded theory analysis. The fieldwork was conducted in New York City and Washington DC. Data sources included: (*i*) archival research using newsletters, policy

[2] In this chapter, I use the terms 'Nepalis', 'Nepali diaspora', 'Nepali youths', and 'Nepali immigrants' interchangeably despite being cognizant of the different meanings these embody. This is primarily because even though the research population were youth between the ages of 18 and 20, when they first arrived in the United States, some of them had aged by the time the research was conducted. Further, the participants in the religious and other social gatherings, that is the foci of this chapter, comprised other Nepalis besides the youth that were my primary research participants. As a result of this, it is difficult to differentiate my primary research participants from the others who also participated in such events.

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papers, pamphlets, mission statements, newspapers like *Nepali Awaz* and *Nepal Abroad* published by Nepali immigrants in the United States, and websites of Nepali organizations in the USA; (*ii*) monitoring of four different internet discussion groups Nepali immigrants had developed, namely, www.liberaldemocracynepal.org, www.nepal-horizons.com, www.samudaya.org, and www.sajha.com; and (*iii*) in-depth and open-ended interviews with 99 Nepali youths of different political and ideological orientations. The selection of the research participants was based on three criteria. They had to be: (*i*) individuals who came to the United States to pursue higher education and were initially on an F-1, J-1, or M-1 visa; (*ii*) were between the ages of 18 and late 20s when they arrived in the USA, because those are considered to be the impressionable years when one's political outlook, values, and norms take enduring forms; and (*iii*) were at least in their second semester or had been in the United States for more than six months. This final criterion was used in order to ensure that the research participants were acquainted with, if not immersed in, life in USA.

I paid significant attention to ensuring that my sample of Nepali youths comprised a representative sample of individuals from the different geographic regions of Nepal, age range, academic levels, gender, ethnicity, frequency of visits to Nepal, and economic background. Accordingly, my sample of 99 Nepali youths consisted of 69 per cent males and 31 per cent females; 55 per cent represented dominant groups, the Bahuns and the Chhetris, and the remaining were from the so-called marginalized groups, including Janajatis, Dalits, and Madheshis. Further, while 53 per cent of my respondents came from Kathmandu, the other 47 per cent were from outside Kathmandu but overwhelmingly from urban centres such as Pokhara, Nepalganj, Butwal, and so on. While the population distribution in the sample suggests an over-representation primarily of Bahuns compared to their population distribution in Nepal,[3] this is perhaps an accurate representation of their proportions in the USA, especially considering that most of the immigrants to the US tend to be from privileged groups in their home countries (Wang and Freeland 2004).

3 According to the 2011 census, Bahuns and Chhetris constitute approximately 31 per cent of Nepal's total population.

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It is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into greater detail about the background of the participants and their migration pathways, but it is important to note here that they had arrived in the USA through a number of different routes (see Hangen, Chapter 10 above, on the migration pathways of these youth). While most of the participants I interviewed were bona fide students who had come to the United States to pursue educational degrees, and had achieved various levels of success and failure, some of those I spoke to were individuals who had used their student status as a step towards acquiring American citizenship or permanent residency. Upon arrival in the US, these individuals dropped out of school and spent much of their time seeking ways to remain in the US—through 'paper marriage', as asylum-seekers, refugees, and so on, or were simply waiting for an administration that would declare an amnesty for illegal immigrants.

While some of the fieldwork for the study was conducted at a time when the monarchy was very active in Nepal, the period subsequent to the April 2006 People's Movement in Nepal provided a unique opportunity to understand the manner in which the broader Nepali community in the USA was relating to the political changes under way in Nepal. Specifically, following the success of the People's Movement, on 18 May 2006 the Government of Nepal issued a proclamation declaring the end of the monarch's absolute powers and the transformation of Nepal into a 'secular state' from a Hindu kingdom.[4] The declaration, which was drafted in the spirit of the second People's Movement, superseded the 1990 Constitution and was hailed as the 'Nepali Magna Carta', which, according to Prime Minister Girija Koirala at the time, "represents the feelings of all the people".[5] The proclamation further

4 The proclamation, also known as the Act of 18 May 2006, which was passed unanimously by Parliament, did away with all royal privileges and powers of the monarchy, including removing the king from his position as commander-in-chief of the army and putting the 90,000 troops under parliamentary control; imposing taxes on the royal family and its assets; conferring only ceremonial authority on the monarchy; dissolving the Raj Parishad, the royal advisory council; removing all references to the royalty from army and government titles; and declaring Nepal a secular state instead of its previous status as a Hindu kingdom.

5 'Vote to curb Nepal king's powers', available at news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4992508.stm. Accessed on 30 July 2016.

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indicated that henceforward all citizens, regardless of religious persuasion, would have equal rights. The announcement drew mixed reactions from the Nepali diaspora, and this chapter is an attempt to understand and analyse these responses. In other words: How did Nepali youth in the USA imagine the 'secularism' that had just been announced in Nepal?[6]

THE NEPALI COMMUNITY IN THE UNITED STATES

While there is no reliable data on the number of Nepali immigrants living in USA, especially since many of them enter on a student or a tourist visa and overstay their visit, the numbers are estimated to be significant. In Chapter 10 of this volume, Hangen provides an overview of the estimated number of Nepalis in USA. But with regards to the youth population, the focus of this study, despite Nepal's relatively small size in terms of population and low economic base, Nepali students numbered 8,155 in the year 2013–14 and 8,158 in 2014–15, ranking nineteenth overall in terms of countries of origin of international students in American universities and colleges (IIE 2016). Evidently, these figures do not take into account the estimated thousands, including youths, who manage to enter the United States illegally or overstay their visit visas to join the 'undocumented' labour force in the US.

The reasons for such significant inflows of Nepalis, particularly youth, to the USA are many. But, notably, it is not uncommon in middle-class Nepali families, especially in the capital, Kathmandu, to have children who have either left home to study abroad or are in the process of preparing to leave in order to do so (Sijapati 2011). There are a host of factors to explain why Nepali youth, particularly students, move abroad, and this includes the poor state of higher education institutions in Nepal; the prestige of a foreign degree; availability of funding opportunities, particularly in the USA; the possibility of immigrating; the rise in the number of preparatory schools training

[6] As described by Letizia (2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2016) in Nepal too, 'secularism' and its Nepali equivalent, *dharma-nirapeksata*, has been scrutinized and understood in a variety of highly contested ways.

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students for higher education in the West; social constraints; and political instability in Nepal; to name a few (Sijapati 2011).

During the course of the research, I was particularly struck by the manifold ways in which these individuals interpreted the meaning of secularism and expressed their positions on secularism as it related to Nepal. But this pattern of reimagining social identities and categories in a transnational context through references to a local context, in this case, political events in Nepal, perhaps is increasingly becoming common. Hangen (Chapter 10 above) presents a similar line of enquiry when discussing how political events, conflicts, and issues in Nepal influence the concerns of Nepali associations in New York, thus effectively blurring the boundaries between the local and transnational.

For heuristic purposes, I will distinguish three dominant narratives that prevailed in the discussions around the significance of secularism in Nepal: (*i*) secularism as a form of political recognition of hitherto marginalized groups; (*ii*) secularism as a foundation of democracy and liberalism; and (*iii*) secularism as antithetical to Nepali culture and beliefs. It should be pointed out that these are not discrete narratives and should perhaps be considered as part of a continuum even though the positions across different population groups were quite distinctive and rigid. Further, in this chapter, I focus less on why certain groups of youths opposed secularism in Nepal while the others celebrated it, and more on how different transnational social ties, as well as experiences in the US, condition the political identifications of youth, whether as secularists or otherwise.[7]

SECULARISM AS A FORM OF POLITICAL RECOGNITION

Once the 18 May 2006 proclamation declaring Nepal as a secular state was made in Nepal, it was broadcast over the internet and other sources, making the news available instantaneously to the Nepali diaspora in the USA. Reminiscing on the situation in Nepal, many in the Nepali diaspora, particularly those from ethnic backgrounds

7 For more on transnational ties amongst Nepalis in USA, see Sijapati (2009–10, 2014).

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(commonly known as Janajatis), welcomed it with a lot of enthusiasm. As was the case in Nepal (Gellner, Hausner, and Letizia 2016; Letizia 2011, 2015b), Janajatis in the USA also claimed that the declaration of Nepal as a secular country marked, at long last, the recognition of Nepal's ethnic diversity. As Karma, a Sherpa living in Washington DC, said to me during an interview:

> A large section of the Nepali population has for long been living under the shadow of state-sponsored Hinduism ... this system had been killing people because it virtually stripped them from their core—their culture and identity. However, the introduction of secularism in Nepal now marks a new dawn—a new hope that Nepal's diverse ethnic groups and their culture and identity will finally be recognized.

Notably, Karma's understanding of what secularism means is defined largely by the implications of secularism for Nepal's Janajatis—recognition of their distinct identity and culture. During the course of the entire conversation not once did he reflect on what it could mean for religious minorities like Nepali Muslims or Nepali Christians. In fact, even in Nepal, the most vocal advocates of secularism have not been representatives from religious minorities per se—those who would be directly impacted by the discourses around secularism. Instead, they have been the Janajatis, many of whom had been Hinduized to varying degrees and had been searching for their pre-Hindu roots. For them, the Hindu state was the main factor responsible for holding back state acknowledgement of their cultures and identities in Nepal, and secularism, followed by the ouster of the monarchy, would eventually lead to greater recognition for minority cultures, languages, and identities (see also Letizia 2011).

In the days and months that followed, as I participated in different activities on Nepal organized in the USA, both physically as well as online, I was able to observe closely the ways in which the Nepali community was experiencing, interpreting, and acting upon the proclamation of Nepal as a secular state. Mirroring the situation in Nepal, there was a hardening of positions amongst the Nepali diaspora, too. Those who took a cautious approach to the declaration were dubbed 'Hindu fundamentalists', and even accused of being against the rights of marginalized groups, while those who welcomed the declaration were considered liberal and democratic. Online discussion forums

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became sites for spiteful altercations amongst Nepalis. The following is an excerpt from sajha.com, an online discussion forum (with all spelling and grammatical errors as well as abusive language left as in the original):

> **Birbhadra:** Since people are fighting so much already i think there is going to be a conflict over several issues related to religion in the near future. But only time will tell.
> **Jaymehta:** Birbhadra; I am sure you are a BAHUN![8]
> **Vhootee:** Amazing how hypocracy is universal with every race and nation! It's hard to let go your power. In the past, we here at Sajha have seen so many caste bashing threads and there was one unamous voice infavor of tolerance and equality ... the same people seem to be nervous now and are exercising their inner hypocracy when the 'Hindu' tag is removed from the constitution. No matter what, it's easy to say about equality among social gatherings and definetly very easy to type on your computer to pour your years of education's worth. Deep down inside, we're all hypocrats ... just beacuse we have lived in peace in the past with Hindu declared as the main religion doesn't necesrily mean the socitey was better. It has created division realted with caste discrimination in marriage, untouchable and many more ...
> **Birbhadra:** To Jay Mehta: whether i am a bahun or newar or bhote[9] or Rai that is none of your f* business. however if Indian agents like you come tread on my land there will be only two things: 1. your Gardan primed with little water for easy hacking[10] 2. My grandfather's Khukuri[11] which hasn't tasted enemy's blood for quite sometime okay dhoti bro be careful who you mess with. (Sajha 2006a)

[8] Bahun is a local term generally used in Nepal for high-caste Brahmins from the hills. In this instance, it is used in a slighting manner.

[9] 'Bhote' is a used pejoratively throughout Nepal for people of Tibetan descent. Even though the term 'bhote' is derived from 'Bhotiya,' it is used in a derogatory manner for various ethnic groups of Nepal.

[10] The reference here is to animal sacrifice in Nepal. Specifically, while carrying out animal sacrifice, a small amount of water is placed on the neck (*gardan*) of the victim to facilitate a rapid decapitation.

[11] A *khukuri* is a Nepali knife akin to a machete but with an inwardly curved blade that is used as a tool as well as a weapon. It is a characteristic weapon of the Nepali Army and Gurkha regiments throughout the world. As a cultural icon, it represents bravery and valour.

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In this exchange, Birbhadra starts off the discussion hinting at the commonly held fear that secularism will open the door to the expansion of Islam and Christianity, and more importantly, religious conflict. Particularly, many like Birbhadra believe that the declaration of secularism would cause fissures in the religious harmony which until then had supposedly existed even under the guise of Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom. The others respond to the thread by pointing out that the Hindu state was a cover for Bahun hegemony. Evidently, the tone of the exchange, including the accusation of being an Indian agent, is typical of many on social media, but it nevertheless reflects the actual sentiments of people who feel free to say whatever they like under the protection of pseudonyms.

On both sides of this divide, secularism was perceived as a triumph for the marginalized groups, including those in the diaspora. This sentiment was further reinforced through immigrant organizational networks, particularly organizations that cater to specific Nepali ethnic groups. For instance, the United Sherpa Association (Sherpa Kyidug) had been mobilizing the Sherpas in New York on the grounds that Sherpas have been experiencing double discrimination—discriminated by American society for being immigrants or foreigners in their land and discriminated by the larger Nepali immigrant community in the USA because of the stereotype of Sherpas as low-status porters. The latter, the Sherpas argued, was comparable to the discrimination faced by them in Nepal as well. Thus, for them, the announcement of secularism came with the promise that their identity, culture, and heritage would be treated on a par with their Hindu counterparts both at home and in a foreign land.

It is important to note here not only how Nepali immigrant communities' imagined identities are inextricably tied to changes in the home country, but that 'transnationalism', particularly as mediated by migrant websites like sajha.com and home-country institutions, influences and conditions the diasporic experiences of Nepalis in the USA. The declaration of secularism resulted in ethnic groups in Nepal reinforcing the notion of pan-ethnic identity, which in the case of Sherpas was a pan-Sherpa identity, forging collective consciousness with the diaspora while also drawing them into the struggle for greater recognition of their culture and identity. For instance, Lucky Sherpa,

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a leading female Janajati activist, wrote the following note on the internet to the Sherpa Kyidug on the same day that Nepal was declared a secular country:

> Dear Sherpa Brothers and Sisters
> Tasi Delek
> Congratulations to all of you for the victory of having Nepal as a Secular State and making kneel down the so called royal govt and royalists. Nepalese people have started to celebrate the victory by organizing various programs. I would like to request the Sherpa people of New York and specially Sherpa Kyidug to organize one Victory rally in support of Secularism. Hurray
> It's the time for Celebration and once again Many Many Congratulations
> Best Wishes
> Lucky Sherpa
> Executive Member
> Nepalese Women Alliance for Constituent Assembly. (Sherpa 2006)

Figure 11.1 Sherpa Association gompa in Jackson Heights, New York.

Source: D.N. Gellner (6 April 2017).

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Figure 11.2 Interior of the Sherpa Association gompa.

Source: D.N. Gellner (6 April 2017).

As suggested by Lucky Sherpa, the Sherpa Kyidug in New York did organize an event the same month to celebrate Nepal's new status as a secular country. Interestingly, the event also included a discussion of the changing situation in Nepal and the opportunities and challenges posed for the greater Sherpa community across the world. The discussion, among other things, dwelt on how the Sherpa community in the USA should demand and lobby to reduce the number of Hindu holidays in Nepal, introduce a three-day national holiday for Lhosar, make changes in the education curriculum, and so on—all things that relate to Nepal and not to their position as an immigrant community. Such claims-making not only points to a convergence between immigrant community and home country, but also to the ways in which transnational social networks simultaneously contribute towards the socialization of immigrants while also providing space for the immigrant community to enact their homeland politics.

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SECULARISM AS A FOUNDATION OF DEMOCRACY AND LIBERALISM

While some Nepali youths continue to closely identify with their ascribed identities from back home, leading to associational ties that determine the ways in which they understand the changing political space in Nepal, for others the experience in the host country, that is the USA, was equally significant. Besides the Janajatis in the US, another group of vocal proponents of secularism were the more liberal and educated amongst the Nepali diaspora whose values and beliefs were largely moulded by the academic climate of their colleges and universities.[12] As Roshan, a Bahun student in New York, said:

> Before, I used to be proud of being a Hindu and I used to observe all our rituals and practices, such as refraining from eating beef, etc. But then when you sit together with a bunch of people who practise all religious faiths and beliefs—some who eat beef, some who do not, some who eat pork, some who do not, etc., then you begin to realize that giving equal respect to all religions and faiths is important.

These sentiments expressed by Roshan were echoed by many other youngsters who were similarly positioned. Secularism for them meant appreciation of diverse religious beliefs and faiths, the learning of which was mediated directly through instruction as well as the ways in which multiculturalism as a value was being enacted in the colleges and universities they attended.

These linkages between educational experiences and political views came out clearly during conversations that I had with Nepali youths. But, perhaps equally important, were the ways in which many of them had also appropriated the blogosphere to express their political views, especially in relation to their experiences in USA, their understanding

[12] While there were several Janajatis who would fall in the category of more liberal and educated amongst the diaspora who also espoused secularism, for the purposes of this chapter, I have reserved this category specifically for Bahuns and Chhetris to describe how their identities and beliefs (in this case, based on the primacy of Hinduism) are influenced by their education and experiences in the academic milieu of colleges and universities in the USA.

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of the country they were in, and the changing dynamics of their home country. Nowhere was this more visible than in discussion groups like sajha.com, where individuals posted news items and collectively discussed the meaning of secularism as it related to Nepal and themselves. The following is an excerpt from a discussion that followed journalist Charles Haviland's story on the BBC website, 'Nepal Hindus in Secular Protest' (Haviland 2006):

> **Karmapa:** The protests in Birgunj were 'engineered' by the disenchanted royalists with ties to the India-based fundamentalist organisations and parties!!!
>
> **Karmapa:** We all know why Mahatma Gandhi (champion of 'Secular India'), whose non-violent movement against the British Raj had been inspired by the teachings of Lord Buddha, was assassinated by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu fanatic? Nathuram Godses are starting to rear their ugly heads in the border towns of Nepal. The disenchanted royalists in cahoots with India-based fundamentalist Hindu orgs and parties (such as VHP, BJP, Shiva Sena, Rastriya Swayam Shevak, etc.) are 'engineering' protests in border towns to pressure the government to make Nepal a 'Hindu state' ... my feeling is that in Nepal we have two diametrically opposed strains running through its Hindu groups & Hindus, broadly speaking: 1) the fundamentalist groups (eg. Bharat Keshari Simha's org) which are remote controlled by India-based fundamentalist Hindu orgs and parties in cahoots with the royalists ... 2) the moderate groups that are by and large made up of Pahariya Hindus. They make up the majority of Hindus of Nepal. They are by and large peaceful and tolerant. They don't lament the fall of the false god king ... Only the moderate and reform-minded Pahariya Hindus can save Hinduism from the corrupting hands of the India-based fundamentalist Hindu orgs & parties and their stooges in Nepal.
>
> **Kalp:** KARMAPA, GANDHI IS MODERN DAY INDIA IS NOT LIKED FOR HIS DEEDS. I HAVE MET SO MANY NEW GENERATION INDIANS WHO HATE HIM. They say they would have a better India of someone like Subhash Chandra Bose was their leader in place of Gandhi ... I feel it is due to Gandhi that India is so much divided in terms of religion ... and, now the religious fundamentalism has raised its ugly head in Nepal too. Sad isn't it?
>
> **Nepali CNN:** In Gandhi's autobiography he mentions Buddha's name 3 times-twice to support his views on being vegetarian and third in discussion about self restraint. Bringing Buddha's name to support Gandhi's secular India is totally out of context. Nepalese leaders have yet to understand the meaning of 'democracy' and the 'rule of people' ... the timing

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of the declaration is no doubt a questionable act and it may bring more violence for a longer time. As we are headed towards a more immature discussion on this topic at the wrong time, I dont see why it was declared in a haste ...

Karmapa: Nepali CNN, nobody said anything about uprooting Hinduism. It is about according equal status to all religions, no matter how small, in the eye of the law or state! ... Hindu fundamentalism is a bigger threat to Hinduism than secularism! See what I mean? And all this happened not under 'Secularism' but under 'Hindu Nepal'. ... Hindu fundamentalism has already taken roots in Nepal because the country's been a 'Hindu state' for so long. Under Secularism, moderate and reform-minded Hindus will gain lots of grounds they have ceded to the Hindu fundamentalists, who are actually religious bigots and supremacists.

Bineet: Secularism is urgently needed where religious leaders dictate legislative agenda. In Nepal there was no interference of temple on the State. The word 'secularism' all of a sudden has become a hallowed and sacred word in Nepal's political parlance ... however, amidst the euphoria of newly gained freedom the possible ramifications of going secular from a Hindu state have not been well debated. The very concept of secularism arose from an urgent need to put an end the tyranny and interference of the Church in the state affairs. It was based on the Christian theological concept that the material world is separate from the spiritual world and correspondingly the state should have sole jurisdiction over one and the Church over the other. In the case of Nepal we have never had religious control, i.e., legislations, such as in Saudi Arabia and Iran or as in Europe for the last 1,500 years.... Providing a variety of silly sops to minorities is not enough to empower them. (Sajha 2006b)

The discussions continued between those who thought that secularism was good for Nepal, and those who were somewhat sceptical, arguing that either the country was not ready for it or that such a decision should be taken in a 'more democratic' manner. Regardless of the positions, a few issues emerged as being central to the nature of the discussions that ensued, including in this thread and others. First, based on the language of the discussions, the claims and counterclaims were expressed by those with a fairly good command of the English language and clearly knowledgeable about the discourses of democracy, enlightenment, freedom, and justice that the participants in the discussions presumably had acquired through their education and/or acquaintances. Second, there were also frequent mentions

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of 'what if the United States or Canada were declared a Christian nation?', pointing to the Nepali diaspora's usage of their cultural and political experience in the United States as a frame of reference, which they used to construct their own understanding of the political situation in their country of origin.

As I have described elsewhere (Sijapati 2011), pursuing academic study in USA mediated the political learning of many Nepali youths—both directly through instruction and indirectly through exposure to different aspects of college life in a liberal academic climate. The 'hidden curriculum' embodied in non-hierarchical student–teacher relationships, classroom procedures that respected everyone's opinions, interactions with peers from various backgrounds, and so on, helped these Nepalis learn as well as appreciate democratic norms and values. These individuals who described having read about the French Revolution, totalitarian and authoritarian systems, civil rights movements, among others, mentioned how they had begun to feel uncomfortable with the notion of Nepal as a Hindu kingdom because of its undemocratic bearings. By contrast, secularism for them signified democratic norms and values, both of which were to be promoted and embraced.

SECULARISM AS ANTITHETICAL TO NEPALI CULTURE AND BELIEFS

While most of those in the Nepali diaspora who embraced the declaration of Nepal as a secular country were either from ethnic communities or those who had received a more liberal education in the United States, there was much greater diversity amongst those who expressed disagreement. Broadly speaking, these groups of people were either reacting to the declaration vis-à-vis their own positions or experiences in the USA or they were simply opposing it because they understood their own identity as a Nepali and the country's identity as being intimately linked with Hinduism.

When asked about their thoughts on secularism, these individuals unequivocally stressed the importance of Hinduism in Nepali society and culture—the fact that the uniqueness of Nepali identity resided in its monarchy and the Hindu tradition, both of which were essential part of their own individual identities. Why were individuals

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Figure 11.3 Nepali restaurant, Jackson Heights.

Source: D.N. Gellner (6 April 2017).

so insistent on deriving their own identity from Hinduism (as well as the monarchy) even after having lived in the USA for at least a year? There are two main reasons for this: increased hostility towards immigrants, especially brown-skinned people, in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the effects of early socialization, which was further reinforced in the USA through transnational organizations and networks. I will examine each of these reasons in turn.

In the recent literature on immigration and race relations, migration scholars have argued that when immigrants face hostility in a foreign country, it becomes important for them to idealize their home country's culture and traditions as a defence against discrimination which then leads them to develop a more conservative outlook.[13]

[13] See Anthias (1998), Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc (1994), Cohen (1997), Goldring (1998), Kurien (2004), Østergaard-Nielsen (2001), Safran (1999).

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This was reflected in the case of Nepalis who repeatedly underscored the importance of the need to secure 'our' identity which they insisted is derived largely from Hindu values and traditions. For instance, Rakesh, a 19-year-old Chhetri, stressed:

> All we have in this country [the United States] is our Nepali identity, culture, and values. I don't know under whose influence decisions are being made in Nepal to erase our history, culture, and identity—it seems like people have forgotten about who we are and they do not care about it ... I used to, and continue to hold my head in pride when I say that Nepal is the only Hindu kingdom in the world ... that is our identity you know ... we cannot emulate the Whites and in fact, they would not accept us as equals ... and now that even that unique identity has been stripped away from us ...

The experiences of discrimination that Nepalis experience are not unfounded either. As has been widely documented, some segments of White New Jersey youths, who called themselves 'Dotbusters,'[14] even issued a manifesto in the local press claiming that they would "go to any extreme to get Indians [South Asians] to move out of Jersey City."[15] Further, in many instances, these nativist xenophobic tendencies are even given public legitimacy by the likes of Pat Buchanan, who announced much earlier, "Our [White-American] culture is superior to other cultures, superior because our religion is Christianity."[16]

Thus, to guard against the discrimination and hostility they experience in the USA, many Nepalis tend to think fondly of their home

[14] The 'dot' referring to the *bindi* (red circle dye, powder, or self-adhesive stickers) that Hindu women wear on their foreheads between their eyebrows.

[15] The White supremacists or 'Dotbusters' were allegedly responsible for two separate incidents—the killing of Navroze Mody, a 30-year-old banker, and injuring of Kushal Sharan, a physician. Similarly, in Artesia, California, acid was sprayed on five South Asians from a passing car as the occupants yelled, "Go back to India. You do not belong here." See Prashad (2000) for more details.

[16] Patrick Joseph 'Pat' Buchanan is an American political commentator, who also served as senior advisor to US presidents, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Ronald Reagan. He lost to George Bush in the 1992 Republican presidential nominations. These remarks were made less than a year later at the conference of Christian Coalition ('Christian Group Keeping to Right', *New York Times*, 12 September 1993).

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country's culture and traditions. This idealizing, in the minds of the youths concerned, is inextricably linked with the monarchy and the Hindu religion. As such, some Nepalis insisted that the 'monarchy in Nepal is an essential part of Nepali identity', 'the uniqueness of the Nepali identity results from the fact that it is the only Hindu kingdom in the world', or 'the King is a reincarnation of Hindu gods'.

This insistence on equating Hinduism with Nepali culture and identity also needs to be understood in the context of expressions of racism and xenophobia that immigrants, especially brown-skinned individuals, had been experiencing, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. More specifically, in contrast to the commonly held view, at least in mainstream parlance, that the USA is a 'land of immigrants', the years after 9/11 saw increased suspicion of foreigners and also led to the racialization of brown-skinned individuals. In particular, these individuals were subjected to increased vigilance and even institutional discrimination of various kinds. In such a milieu, many Nepalis felt that it was important to insist that Nepalis are Hindus (as opposed to Muslims) despite being similar in colour; the implication being that the latter are the 'real terrorists'. So the locus of attention for Nepalis in the diaspora became the need to emphasize Hinduism versus Islam. As Gagan, a Newar student in New York, explained, "I cannot pretend to be an American because I would not pass as a White. I am a 'brownie' and have a distinct accent ... but then I don't want to be mistaken for being a Muslim or an Arab either. The 'war against terror' has been waged against Muslims but Nepalis are not Muslims and we need to highlight that ..."[17] Among other things, this need to assert their Nepali identity, especially in opposition to Islam, was one of the reasons why the Nepali diaspora insisted on the need to secure Hinduism and the monarchy in Nepal.

While several of the Nepalis derived their rejection of secularism on the basis of their experiences in the United States, many a time an individual's position vis-à-vis secularism was also influenced by Nepali networks and organizations in the United States (Sijapati 2009–10). To cite an example, in almost all the non-political public

[17] The claim that 'Nepalis are not Muslims' is a common attitude even in Nepal despite the fact that almost 5 per cent of Nepalis are Muslims.

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events organized by Nepalis in the United States that I had attended in the early 2000s, the event generally was inaugurated by a chief guest lighting a ceremonial lamp (*diyo*), playing the Nepali national anthem that revered the monarchy, listening to the *mangal dhun*,[18] and on several occasions even placing garlands on the pictures of the king and queen.

Similarly, after 2006, many events were organized in Hindu temples in USA, particularly in large cities like New York and Washington DC, which is home to significant populations of Nepalis, to argue against secularism. For instance, in late 2006, there was a series of events organized at the Satya Narayan temple in New York City where the focus of discussion invariably veered towards the supposed mistake Nepal had made by declaring the country secular and getting rid of the monarchy.

Other initiatives that Nepali networks have been organizing to bring together the Nepali immigrant community have also largely been influenced by Hindu values and traditions, with the notable exceptions of those that are based on ethnic, caste, or regional identifications. For instance, the Association of the Nepalis in the America (ANA) has purchased a 3.4-acre property in Maryland to establish the Nepal Education and Cultural Center that serves as a 'window to Nepal, Nepali art, music, crafts' while also functioning as a centre for Nepali religious activities, though most of their activities have been exclusively based on Hindu traditions with sporadic Buddhist events such as the celebration of the birth of the Buddha. Confirming Prashad's (2000: 115) postulation about the nature of immigrant-sponsored activities, in these events organized by Nepalis, culture operates less in the 'anthropological sense', as 'what we do', and more in the normative sense of 'what every person should know'. To put it differently, these events that Nepali organizations and networks organize, such as the Teej celebration,[19] cultural performances, Dasain

[18] A tune with Hindu religious meaning played for the auspicious beginning of any new activity or initiative.

[19] Teej, a festival dedicated to the Hindu goddess Parvati to commemorate her union with Lord Shiva, involves women fasting in order to seek marital bliss, the well-being of the husband and children, and purification of their own body and soul.

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festival, Nepali language classes, and so on, encourage a kind of cultural literacy among community members that seeks to foster a deep sense of religiosity, primarily Hinduism, amongst Nepalis. However, as Hangen (in Chapter 10 above) indicates, these gatherings, performances, and festivities are attended by Bahuns, Chhetris, and upper-caste Hindu Newars, while other groups, such as the Sherpa Kyidug, organize separately for the Sherpa community, the Tamangs for their own, and so on.

Regardless, these Nepali cultural organizations provide youths with a venue to reassert their political beliefs and values while also idealizing their home country, its traditions and culture. This becomes all the more important for youths who have lost their social as well as legal status in the USA. Engagement with these organizations also helps them derive a sense of belonging with an idealized place of home, if not with the USA itself.

The fact that the experiences and learning in the USA influence the orientations of the immigrant community, especially the ways in which they interpret and imagine the transformations in the host country, however, should not be construed to mean that early-life experiences do not also play a role in an individual's belief systems. On the contrary, my research indicates that early learning continues to have considerable effects even after the immigrant has experienced significant changes in the host society. For instance, Kapil, a Bahun, said:

> I am a product of a Catholic school in Nepal. While I attended St. Xavier's, my sisters went to St. Mary's. Our parents worked very hard to send us to these schools and even though the school helped me become who I am today, I question their way of teaching which I now realize was their attempt at proselytizing Nepalis ... Nepal is a one hundred percent Hindu nation with a few Buddhists, but because of these schools and the affiliated churches sprouting everywhere in Nepal now, people are converting to Christianity and now even Islam. These religious institutions are offering bribes, various offerings, monetary benefits to proselytize Nepalis. These institutions are basically taking advantage of people's poverty and naïveté to change our Hindu nation into a Christian nation or a Muslim one ...

Kapil was born into an upper-middle-class Bahun family in Kathmandu where "religion [Hinduism] figured as a central part of family life". Despite their religious proclivities, the family had decided to send Kapil to a Jesuit school because "during those times, all the

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elites of Kathmandu wanted their children to be fluent in English, learn proper manners, table etiquette, have successful careers, things like that."[20] The effect of being raised simultaneously in two different environments—one marked by Christian traditions and the other by the religious and cultural ethos of Hinduism—had left an 'ambivalent mark' on Kapil's self-identity. "At home, we followed all the Hindu rituals and ceremonies, but in school, I prayed to Lord Jesus, before meals, after meals, etc ... and I did not know where I belonged in these two opposite spectrums."

When asked about how he has come to identify more closely with Hinduism, Kapil recalled that leaving Nepal and relocating to a place where Christianity was the norm and Hinduism was a religion practised in the margins by some minority communities, "reinforced [his] Hindu cultural beliefs, practices and rituals became more important". Evidently, this form of religious identification in Kapil's perceptions of the self is one of the ways in which he is able to defend himself from the disorientation, marginalization, and alienation caused by migration.

The narratives of many youths like Kapil point to two contradictory macro-level factors which have helped them sustain their personal identities along religious lines. First, as Herberg (1960) pointed out, in the USA, while prevailing conceptions of assimilation have often expected immigrants to sever ties with their home country, they are not, however, required to abandon their religion. Since religion is sanctioned as an 'acceptable' basis for community formation in the USA, some of the Nepali immigrants, like many other immigrant communities, have used it as a means for 'ethnic' expression and self-identification (Warner 1993: 1058).[21]

[20] The two most prominent Jesuit schools in Kathmandu are St. Xavier's School, Jawalakhel and Godavari, for boys, and St. Mary's School in Jawalakhel for girls. These schools were established in the early 1950s and continue to be regarded as among the best schools in Nepal. Since religious proselytization has long been banned in Nepal, the schools never overtly proselytize, but their penchant for religious influence is evidenced by symbolism such as the motto of St. Xavier's: 'Educational excellence, spiritual growth and social justice for the active service of God, Nepal and the human community'.

[21] This acceptance of minority religions has changed, particularly in the case of Islam, over the years since 9/11.

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While practices of the Hindu religion have gained acceptance in the USA, in Nepal the primacy of Hinduism has been eroding as the discourse of secularism gradually takes centre-stage. Unsettled by Nepal's journey towards secularism, Kapil, together with other Nepalis, has established a Sanatan Dharma Society in New York, which, in addition to conducting religious ceremonies, is also involved in actively seeking to return Nepal to being a Hindu nation. "Our little group here is doing activism, social work here and there, writing letters to religious leaders of Hindu organizations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, including developing close ties with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad America, and so on, but that is only patchwork, the real work needs to be done back home, in Nepal," Kapil explained. Thus, while immigrants continue to mediate and interpret their religiosity based on their experiences in the USA and their understanding of home-country dynamics, for some, certain values, attitudes, and beliefs persist based on early-life influences. Relocation to another country or society does not change them significantly.

***

I have argued that transnational migration does not only influence the transformation of religious life in the immigrant context but also encourages distinctive religious identifications as immigrant communities use their experiences in the host society as a frame of reference in a multitude of ways to assess and understand transformations in their home country. In this regard, I have identified three different positions taken up by Nepali youths in the USA in relation to secularism: as a form of political recognition; as a foundation of democracy and liberalism; and as a value that is antithetical to Nepali culture and beliefs. It is important to understand these positions both in relation to the diaspora situation in the USA and in relation to the implications for Nepal. Again, this reaffirms Hangen's argument (Chapter 10 above) that the 'transnational' and the 'local' are not distinct categories as they are generally represented to be. Notably, the different conceptions of secularism in the diaspora mirror, in many regards, the different ways in which Nepalis in Nepal, too, have sought to "understand, implement, resist, and adapt ideas of secularism" (Gellner and Letizia 2016: 1).

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The research conducted for this chapter was carried out in 2006 when Nepal was undergoing major socio-political upheavals. Hence, the sentiments amongst the Nepali diaspora, whether in support of or against secularism and other transitions, were particularly acute. Now that secularism has been given constitutional recognition in Nepal,[22] the tendency to imagine Nepal as a 'Hindu nation' by the Nepali diaspora has almost certainly waned, with only a minority actively seeking a return to a religious definition of the nation.

Whether the Nepali community in the United States is supportive of secularism in Nepal or not is perhaps of lesser significance. More important is the finding of this research that, in a globalized world, the transnational ties that are available to migrants, whether in the form of migrant websites, migrant associations, or personal ties across borders, not only influence the construction of immigrants' religious identities but also allow immigrants, in this case immigrant youths, to negotiate their religious identities and affiliations based on their early influences as well as their "existential experiences" (Bu 2003: 2) in the host society. Thus, on the issue of imagining secularism, the chapter points out that there is no one way in which Nepali youth in the USA have appropriated or constructed its meaning. Instead, the process of imagining secularism itself is a dynamic endeavour to make sense of local, historical, and contemporary changes, both where they live and where they came from, which, in turn, is mediated by experiences in the host society, transnational linkages, and associations between home and host societies, as well as the enduring influence of early-life experiences. Further, engaging and participating in the home country's political and social fields, albeit at a distance, provides the diaspora with a sense of belonging.

[22] Article 4 of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 states: "Nepal is an independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive democratic, socialism-oriented federal democratic republican state."

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12

THE *KHORA* OF MIGRATION

EVERYDAY PRACTICES OF (WELL) BEING AND BELONGING BETWEEN MUSTANG, NEPAL, AND NEW YORK CITY

Sienna R. Craig and *Nawang Tsering Gurung*

The process of acquiring identity is a dramaturgy of finding a voice. The psychic status of migrancy carries in embryo something about the status of identity in general. In other words, what it is to be a migrant—the effort you make to fit in to a culture, to find a voice in a culture, to find an identity in a culture—pretty much mimics what everybody else has to do anyway, except it is more foregrounded.

—Filmmaker John Akomfrah, upon receiving the 4th Princess Margret Award (2012)

Memory springs like crocuses in bloom.
Self conscious and precise.
Without blurring the cornea, details
are resuscitated. Dried yak meat between teeth.
Semblance of what is ...
Communication efforts require the right initiative.
Somewhere along the line matters
of motion and rest are resolved ...

—Excerpt from 'Bardo', a poem by Tsering Wangmo Dhompa (2003)

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I USED TO WALK AROUND the walled city of Lo Monthang, high in Nepal's Mustang district, near the border with Tibet.[1] Often, I would follow behind Jigme Dorje Palbar Bista, the *gyalpo*[2] or king, of Lotö Tshod Dun, as he performed his daybreak *khora*.[3] This circumambulation, an embodied act of religious practice, marked daily time as well as the *longue durée* of lineage. As he strolled around his domain in the company of his inner circle of male companions, I contemplated the 24 such leaders who had gone before him, a legacy of local governance centuries deep in this place. I kept my distance, but enjoyed the resonance of male chatter and prayers. The king was vital then—a bowlegged horseman in his sixties with strong opinions yet a gentle demeanour.

Now, 20 years later, the gyalpo of Lo no longer walks this well-worn route. The man who the people of Lo referred to as *'Kundun'*—a word which means 'presence' in Tibetan and is the same term Tibetans use to reference His Holiness the Dalai Lama—passed out of this life in December 2016, at the age of 86.[4] He spent his last years in his son's home in Kathmandu. During our visits in recent years, I imagined

[1] The first author (Sienna) drafted this chapter and the first person singular refers to her; but both authors were intimately involved in producing the chapter and the plural is used where appropriate. All names, except Nawang's, are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the persons concerned. Tb. = Tibetan, Np. = Nepali.

[2] Throughout this chapter, we use the phonetic Tibetan transcription system developed through the Tibetan and Himalayan Library available at: www.thl.org. While this system does not render precise orthographic transliteration, as does the more conventional Wylie system, it renders Tibetan words pronounceable to the non-specialist, and as such, seemed more appropriate for this volume.

[3] Lotö Tsho Dun (Tb. *Glo bo stod tsho bdun*) are the Seven Sectors of Upper Lo, corresponding to villages north of Gelung, in upper Mustang District, Nepal (see Ramble 2008b). We use the term *khora* throughout this chapter to signify two interrelated Tibetan language terms, *skor ba* and *'khor ba*. The former references the physical act of circumambulation and is often transliterated as *kora*; the latter, transliterated as *khora* or *khorwa*, encompasses circumambulation but has broader meanings, as described in more detail below.

[4] For more on the death of the king, see Craig (2016).

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that he travelled that route around Lo Monthang daily in his mind as he recited mantras and fingered his prayer beads. I can visualize his son and heir doing khora with his Lhasa-born wife during their summers in Mustang. I wonder what the king's eldest grandson—educated in India and the US—makes of this routine. Will he keep walking this route?

Lobsang travels the pathways of Central Park, following well-kept trails and the whims of the dogs he walks to earn a living. He has been in the United States since 2012. Educated at the Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamsala, India, he then spent some time at college in Kathmandu.[5] Born in Mustang but raised primarily in a boarding-school milieu with the children of exiled Tibetans, he is now navigating the choppy waters of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the demands of New York. Lobsang struggles to get his bearings, to know where he belongs. He speaks Hindi-inflected English. Though his standard Tibetan is crystalline, he has lost much of his village dialect, his mother's tongue. As much as Lobsang feels his family's pride in his success—educated and now living in the place called *Amrika*—he also lives the fragmented nature of transnational kinship. Unmarried and in his late twenties, he bears remittance responsibilities for his family members back in Nepal.

These migratory movements, begun when Lobsang was very young, seem to provoke in him loneliness and depression, here in New York. Unlike the married women from Mustang—babysitters and nail technicians by day—who gather on Sundays to say *mani* (prayers), he has few confidantes. Facebook 'friends' only go so far. Lobsang's married cousin and his wife have been kind hosts. He lives with them and

5 The Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) in Dharamsala was the first school for Tibetan children established in India after 1959, an effort spearheaded by Jetsun Pema, the sister of Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. TCV has now become a network of schools whose mission is to ensure that "all Tibetan children under its care receive a sound education, a firm cultural identity and become self-reliant and contributing members of the Tibetan community and the world at large". Available at: www.tcv.org.in/content/tcvs-mission. Accessed on 31 May 2016. Students from Tibetan border regions, such as Mustang, are at times enrolled at TCV.

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their two young children in a two-bedroom apartment in Sunnyside, Queens. But his days stretch on into an uncertain future.

After a decade in America, mostly spent washing dishes and chopping vegetables in a Chinese buffet off the New Jersey Turnpike, Kunsang returns to Kathmandu. He leaves only after having finally succeeded in securing legal residency and summoning his wife and daughters to New York from Nepal. His trip home is not felicitous but, rather, urgent. He arrives just in time to see his father before he dies. In circumambulating the globe to honour his lineage, Kunsang performs a khora of migration as an act of filial duty. At first he stays at his sister's home in Kathmandu where his father has convalesced for the last two years. In his late 70s, Kunsang's father suffered from liver and kidney disorders, and, in the end, was overcome by the tuberculosis he likely lived with for years.

For the last days of his father's life, Kunsang walks the path around the sacred *chöten* (Np. *stupa*) at Bauddha each morning and evening, as his father would have done if he were able—as he did every day until he no longer could. After the elder's passing, Kunsang travels with his cousin back to his family home in Lo Monthang where he stays through the forty-nine days of the *bardo*, the stage between death and rebirth in Tibetan Buddhist tradition. After years away from this house, Kunsang empties and refills offering bowls with water, lights butter lamps, sleeps well in this old rammed earth and mud brick structure. At times, he wakes with a start, unaccustomed to the quiet. Now, he expects sirens and the incessant rattle of the 7 Train. As much as he worries about where he will find work again when he returns to New York, as much as he feels this home's emptiness without his wife and with his father now gone, his mother long ago deceased, and only an elderly monk uncle remaining in Mustang, Kunsang knows that, right now, this is where he belongs.

At thirteen, Pema stands at the front of a group of children, most of whose parents hail from Mustang. It is a Saturday summer morning in Brooklyn. Instead of watching cartoons or text messaging her middle school friends, Pema struggles to read a short news article in Tibetan, the subject of which is friendship. Pema was not born in the USA but she has lived here since she was five. She has only ever

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known the American school system and she speaks most comfortably in English, though she is fairly fluent in Nepali. Now, she relies on her younger brother—who was born in New York but then sent back to Nepal where he spent his first six years being raised by grandparents in the village—to help translate the subject of this article.

Nawang, my 'little brother' from Mustang, the co-author of this chapter, and the pioneer behind these weekend language and culture classes, helps her sound out unfamiliar Tibetan words. Clearly embarrassed—is it the fact that she is a teenager or the fact that she struggles to read Tibetan?—Pema limps through this awkward exercise in translation, but comes alive as she pulls out a poster board. With guidance from a painter from Mustang's Muktinath Valley now living in New York and with inspiration drawn from a piece by Tenzin Rigdol, a rising star in the contemporary Tibetan art world, Pema has created her own version of one of Rigdol's most famous collages: the outlines of a Buddha whose body is made of a New York City subway map. Switching into English, Pema describes how she sees her world through this image. "The Buddha is like the culture we protect, like our soul. But inside we live in New York." I, the participant-observer, sit in the corner, imagining the A–C–E line as veins running blue, the 1–2–3–9 trains red as arteries, the purple, yellow, and orange lines stretching across Brooklyn and Queens as *sogtsa*, lifelines.[6]

These opening vignettes point towards much larger stories of immigration, assimilation, transnational identities, and lived experiences. In this chapter, we explore the ways people from Mustang, Nepal, now living in New York City, perform acts of everyday religion in an effort to maintain a sense of well-being and belonging in diaspora. We also discuss the structural and affective challenges to such practices. We examine how emotional spaces between alienation and inclusion map onto physical places for living, working, and coming together in New York. Ultimately, these explorations describe and create ways of being and belonging in the world—experiences that do not merely

[6] This term literally means life force (*srog*) channel (*rtsa*), and represents aspects of how Tibetan physiology is understood according to Tibetan medical and lay understandings. The term 'rtsa' is multivalent when translated into English, at times indicating blood vessels, at other times describing non-visible channels (akin to *chakra*), nerves, or a pulse.

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derive from the state-citizen relationship (whether in Nepal or the USA), but rather express and point towards three rather different senses of identity that are often in tension with one another: that based on connections to specific enclaves within Mustang, that of being Nepali, and that which emerges from generalized displays of Tibetanness. In this sense, such dynamics not only illustrate what it means to identify with a multi-ethnic 'new' Nepal (Hangen 2007; Shneiderman 2009), but also point towards processes of Tibetanization (Ramble 2008a) and, as Childs (2005) puts it, "culture change in the name of cultural preservation".

This chapter echoes and expands upon some of the themes raised in Chapter 10 by Hangen and Chapter 11 by Sijapati, in that all of us are concerned with how religious and cultural identity among diverse subsets of Nepalis operate in the context of American diaspora, and what the social and political implications are of such dynamics. Hangen's work explores the nature of transnational politics between Nepal and New York through action research focused on the workings of several Nepali immigrant organizations in New York. She shows how a 'Nepal bubble effect' keeps political concerns that are playing out *in Nepal* as central to the experiences of many Nepali New Yorkers, regardless of actual physical location. I am also interested in the ways that Mustangis in New York occupy such trans-local spaces—'bubbles' if you will. Their community organizations not only create a sense of belonging—often tied to religious practice—but can also harbour inter-community debates, including over key aspects of political and cultural identity. In the case of Mustangi immigrants, this includes the extent to which they overtly identify *as Nepali* in opposition to their strategically essential use of, and deeply felt embodied enactments of, 'Tibetanness'.

While much of the ethnography that underpins this chapter focuses on an older generation of Mustangi immigrants as well as their American-born children, Sijapati's chapter sheds light on another very important demographic: youth who migrate to USA for educational opportunities. Although beyond the scope of this chapter, I am also interested in this age cohort among Mustangi youth, which resonates with Sijapati's insights about the different ways that immigration and the migrant experience in the USA can help this younger generation "derive a sense of belonging with an idealized place of home, if not

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with the USA itself" (p. 267 above). All three of our chapters reaffirm the idea that the 'transnational' and the 'local' are fluid and interdependent categories, not stark lines of ideological or lived divisions.

In addition to these connections to the work of others in this volume, our work with Mustangi migrants in New York also resonates with Shobha Hamal Gurung's recent scholarship (2015), which highlights Nepali migrant women's experiences in New York, particularly in the informal economy. While Gurung's work certainly highlights themes of sacrifice and challenge faced by her interlocutors—primarily college-educated young Nepali women—she also takes pains to reveal their powerful efforts to build transnational communities through formal and informal social networks and formal advocacy organizations. Although there remain crucial differences between the Mustangi experiences recounted in this chapter and the lived experiences that Gurung documents from other sectors of Nepali diasporic society, both her work and ours speak to shifting social roles, including those inflected by gender, as well as what Gurung calls the "delusions, challenges, and contradictions" (Gurung 2015: 58) posited by the decision to migrate to New York.

This chapter draws on theoretical perspectives to emerge from transnational studies (Khagram and Levitt 2007; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) as well as from the very useful distinction highlighted by the editors of this volume between religion as a *category* of experience and religion as a mode of *practice* (Hausner and Gellner 2012). We also choose to orient this essay around the culturally Tibetan concept of khora. Viewing experiences of migration as a type of khora captures the fluidity and contextual nature of identity beyond an assimilationist paradigm or the boundaries of a particular nation-state. How one acts or the extent to which one feels a sense of belonging depends on where one is situated, with whom one 'walks' khora, both literally, as in the embodied enactment of belonging at the beginnings and ends of days, and figuratively, as in those with whom one moves through experiences of migration. Migrant identities surface through movement and networks. Even so, it is the grounding effect of creating and maintaining a routine in a specific place that allows one to feel stable as the circumstances of one's life continue to change. Khora bespeaks such routine. As with transhumance between summer and winter pastures, the seasonal transitions between farming and trading, or

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the routine of taking the subway to and from work at certain times of day, khora is a predictable act.

As we discuss in more detail below, this term indicates our human roots/routes in ways that resonate with anthropological discussions of modernity and migration (Clifford 1997). Yet instead of emerging from contemporary social theory, khora-as-conceptual-framework is a reflection of Buddhist principles about the nature of desire, interdependence, and *samsara*, that is, cyclic existence. As a category of experience, khora can stand for the pathways we travel from one life, one country, or one world to the next, and back again; it is also a religious practice in which people engage at particular times, in particular places. We argue that khora has become a way of being in the world as a migrant, even as it is a ritual activity that many Mustangis in New York regret not being able to perform on a daily basis.

MUSTANG ON THE MOVE

Mustang district, Nepal, is a high-altitude region in the country's Dhaulagiri Zone, on the border with the Tibet Autonomous Region, China. According to the 2011 Nepal Census, Mustang is home to approximately 13,000 people. The district represents a crossroads of socio-economic, religious, linguistic, political, and geographic confluences. It is a place where peoples and cultures of the southern slopes of the Himalaya meet Tibetan highlanders; where the living traditions of Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism intermingle with indigenous cosmologies, including Bön; where lowland grains have been exchanged for highland salt; and where tithes and tributes to the Tibetan "Lamaist state" (Goldstein 1989) have, over the past three centuries, met practices of taxation and political representation within the Nepali nation-state.[7]

Like other trans-Himalayan communities living on the border between Nepal and Tibet (Bauer 2004; van Spengen 2000; Watkins 1996), people from Mustang have long-established histories of seasonal and cyclic outmigration, often connected to wage labour and

7 See Dhungel (2002), Fürer-Haimendorf (1975), Jackson (1984), Ramble (1992–3), Ramble and Vinding (1987), Snellgrove (1989), Vinding (1998).

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other forms of trade (Craig 2008; Fisher 2001; Ramble 2008b). While people from Mustang are certainly not unique in the sense that they are leaving Nepal for educational and employment opportunities abroad, they are much less likely to become construction workers in Doha, camel herders in Dubai, or domestic servants in Bahrain than they are to be nannies for upwardly mobile families of Indian extraction in New Jersey, stock boys at natural groceries in the gentrifying neighbourhoods off Brooklyn's Eastern Parkway, or *sous chefs* at sushi bars in Manhattan. Their experiences and transnational networks are, in this sense, more closely aligned with Sherpa and Manangi/Nyeshangte Nepali diasporic communities and exile Tibetans living in New York than with other pockets of Nepali society, particularly those that Sijapati describes in Chapter 11 of this volume.

The strategies through which Mustangis find themselves in the boroughs of New York City include entering the country as students (again, as Sijapati describes) but also on tourist visas, as Tibetan Buddhist monastics, or as businesspeople. The collateral costs of procuring a US visa can be prohibitive, often resulting in significant debt that must be repaid over initial years of working in New York (Craig 2002). One of the ways through which people from Mustang stay in New York includes seeking asylum. In the early years of migration from Mustang to New York (beginning in approximately 1997), it was more common for Mustangis to claim exile Tibetan status as a basis for asylum, in great part because being 'Tibetan' made one more recognizable and conferred more social capital than being Nepali (Craig 2002). As political surveillance and repression surrounding being culturally Tibetan in Nepal has increased, especially since 2008, this status has gained a new form of legitimacy, even if citizenship papers might indicate otherwise. Given the threats and extortion experienced by some Mustangi families during the People's War, some individuals have claimed political asylum firmly on Nepali grounds.

As Tina Shrestha (2014) has illustrated, either way these strategies involve crafting a believable narrative of victimization and spinning out an elaborate legal 'drama' from complex webs of lived experience, political consciousness, language(s), and strategic essentialism. Such stories must not only be coherent but should also align with an American moral economy and the trope of the 'worthy' migrant as well as the parameters of US asylum and immigration law. The price

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of failure is significant. If one is not granted asylum, one must often make the impossible choice to leave the US with the plan of returning to Nepal, creating a new Nepali passport, procuring a new visa, returning to the US, and trying again for asylum; or, simply overstaying one's visa and becoming undocumented.

While ten years ago it was more common for one individual from a family to make it to the USA, today entire families are settling in New York. This demographic shift is the logical extension of Legal Permanent Residence (LPR) or 'green card' status and its relation to 'family reunification' provisions, and to the five-year residency window between being granted LPR status and being able to apply for citizenship. The population of first-, 1.5-, and second-generation immigrants—children and teenagers—is expanding rapidly. Meanwhile, back in Nepal, Mustang has seen one of the greatest declines in population since Nepal's last census in 2001, second only after Manang district, which lies just east of Mustang (Childs et al. 2014). (Some today argue that Mustang has now outstripped Manang in terms of the rate of outmigration.) Kinship categories—specifically the blurred cultural line between siblings and parallel cousins—can be used to the advantage of successful asylum seekers, particularly when combined with the ability to procure (for a price) 'official' documents such as citizenship papers (Np. *nagarikta*), proof of schooling, or birth certificates from Nepal as a means of bolstering such legal claims to kinship and, therefore, immigration status—a form of legal belonging. Ironically, as Mustangi families are getting smaller (Childs et al. 2014), the number of people claimed as family through immigration cases expands. Indeed, some interlocutors who have legal residency in the US have spoken of significant social and micro-political pressure to add distant relatives or individuals truly unrelated to them onto claims for legal residence on the basis of kinship. At the same time, the novel implementation of DNA testing into some immigration cases, as a way of proving parentage, has been very complicated for some from Mustang. As in other Tibetan communities, polyandry is practised. In such situations, an individual understood to be someone's 'father' in Mustangi kinship terms might not be considered as such, if he is not proven to be the *biological* father according to techno-scientific tests.

As is well documented in other communities around the world and for other parts of Nepal, the impacts of migration and associated

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remittances have been profound in Mustang.[8] Yet such changes are not just demographic or economic. They also give rise to significant alterations in people's subjectivities—their storied selves, their senses of place, time, work, and social support (Craig 2002, 2011). This not only includes recreating social organizations such as rotating credit systems (Np. *dhukuti*) or social service organizations (Tb. *kyidug*), but also re-envisioning daily acts that, in a non-diasporic context, are essential yet taken for granted ritual practices and processes of enculturation: from circumambulating sacred sites and reciting *mani* to singing folk songs or honouring the dead. When people from Mustang come to New York, such shifts are driven by differential labour demands and revised temporal sensibilities—the socio-economics that shape how space is used and time is passed in New York as opposed to Nepal—as well as by experiential transformations in what acts seem possible, or even necessary, to perform in these new contexts.

POSITIONALITY AND METHODS

I (Sienna Craig) have been engaging with people from Mustang, Nepal, for more than 20 years, and have been keeping track of migration of Mustangis to the greater New York City area since 1997. This has manifested in previous writings on the relationship between sending remittances from New York to Nepal and how such dynamics have contributed to changes in access to health care, shifting conceptions of health and illness, new expectations with regard to medicine(s), and the medicalization of birth (Craig 2011; Craig, Chase, and Lama 2010). I have also explored how flows of social and economic capital from New York to Nepal (Kathmandu, Pokhara, and villages in Mustang) can challenge visions of 'development' and 'cultural preservation' put forward by international organizations or the Nepali state (Craig 2004).

Recent collaborative bio-cultural research on genetics, fertility, and socio-economic change in Mustang and northern Gorkha Districts

[8] For the global situation, see Cohen (2011); for other parts of Nepal, see Kollmair et al. (2006), Loshkin, Bontch-Osmolovski, and Glinskaya (2010), Seddon, Adhikari, and Gurung (2002), and Thieme (2006).

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has helped us to understand, both ethnographically and demographically, the massive social transitions—from education-driven depopulation to fertility decline—occurring in Mustang today.[9] Data from the household survey we conducted for this project has also provided a baseline from which to track the dynamics of Mustangi transnational kinship. Cases range from households in which a spouse or several siblings live in the USA while other family members remain dispersed between Pokhara, Kathmandu, and Mustang, to households that have relocated entirely to New York, leaving their homes, trekking lodges, and fields to be rented by Thakali, Gurung, or Dolpo-pa families. The former pattern seems to be more common among those from Lo, while the latter is more common among those from the Baragaon region.[10] And, interestingly, while more people from Lo live in Queens, the northern part of the landmass that encompasses both Queens and Brooklyn, those from Baragaon live to the south and east, in Brooklyn—an uncanny mirroring of Mustang district's social geography.

Ethnographic research for this chapter has been a collaborative enterprise, involving formal interviews (n=25) as well as focus groups (n=3) on the theme of everyday religious practice and well-being in New York. Interviewees ranged in age from 22 to 53 and were relatively evenly split according to gender and marital status, although more were from upper Mustang than from Baragaon. These interviews aimed to understand how (or if) people take time for ritual practice in their daily lives, especially given the long and intensive hours they work, primarily in the service sector. How do people from Mustang now in New York organize their domestic spaces and come together

9 See Childs et al. (2014). This project, 'Genes and Fertility among Culturally Tibetan Women in Northern Nepal', is supported by the National Science Foundation (Grant No. BCS-1153911). The PI for the project is Cynthia Beall (Case Western Reserve University). Geoff Childs (Washington University–St. Louis) and Sienna Craig (Dartmouth) are co-PIs. Field research for this project was conducted in Mustang (Muktinath Valley and Lo) and northern Gorkha districts (Nubri and Tsum) during the summer of 2012.

10 Baragaon encompasses nineteen settlements along the Kali Gandaki corridor north of Jomsom, and the Muktinath Valley. See Ramble (2008b) for a detailed description of this region.

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as communities? How might such gatherings contribute to maintaining a sense of well-being? Where do such efforts fail? This was supplemented by participant observation and informal interactions at specific community events as well as a review of online forums connected to Mustang and its diasporic communities.

In each of these endeavours, I have worked closely with Nawang Tsering Gurung, this chapter's co-author. In his early 30s, Nawang is himself a product of Mustangi migration and social change. Born into an important household and Bön-po religious lineage in the village of Gelung (or Ghiling) in upper Mustang, Nawang was educated at Tibetan- and Nepali-medium boarding schools in Kathmandu. He earned passage to the USA on a student visa, completed an Associate Degree in Boston, was accepted to Columbia University, and has secured legal residence in the US. Unfortunately he was unable to enrol at Columbia due to the cost of tuition; his financial aid package was insufficient because he accurately reported the income he earned as a waiter in Manhattan—even though this income is used to support his widowed mother and three younger siblings back in Nepal. Nawang continues to work towards the completion of his bachelor's degree at a public university in New York. So, while for a migrant of his generation, his educational trajectory is exceptional, Nawang's social and familial obligations reflect those of his peers. Nawang is the eldest of four children. After the death of his father in 2010, he has taken on the responsibility for settling residual family debt and other responsibilities. Back in Gelung, his mother helps to maintain his family's social position and roles in the village, including acting as rotating headman (*genba*).

For several years in his spare time, Nawang ran a weekend Himalayan Language and Culture Class mentioned in the vignette above.[11] This involved finding teachers and a space in which to meet

[11] This programme ran from September 2012 through June 2014, at which point Nawang's funding and ability to run it came to an end. Others from Mustang have taken up this work and run an informal Sunday school in Queens, which many children from Upper Mustang attend. The New York Tibetan Service Center also operates a Sunday school that is attended by children whose parents come from both the Muktinath Valley region and Upper Mustang.

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Figure 12.1 Sunday Tibetan Language, Culture, and Religion Class at the New York Tibetan Social Service Center, Queens, NY.

Source: S. Craig (24 April 2016).

as well as secure support from Mustangi parents, the New York City government, and a private foundation for this effort. Nawang described the mission of this work as follows: "To create an environment where all kids of Himalayan ancestry can learn, explore, and get acquainted with their language and culture." Although a full discussion of this class remains beyond the scope of this chapter, it is another ethnographic field site from which insights emerge. Nawang's ongoing efforts at community organization and educational entrepreneurship have provided additional perspectives into the politics of language and cultural memory, the valuation of religious practice in diaspora, and the challenges Mustangi families face along the khora of migration.[12]

[12] Nawang worked as a managing director at a Queens-based Tibetan social service centre from 2015 to 2016. He has recently co-founded a social service organization, Yulha (yulhafund.weebly.com), which aims to support social and environmental grassroots initiatives in Mustang. His work on this project was featured in a short documentary honoured at the 2014 Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival Available at: www.vimeo.com/109745992.

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THE KHORA OF MIGRATION

Transnational Studies has become a robust field for social theorizing (Khagram and Levitt 2007). Conceptual imperatives to think in terms of global "scapes" (Appadurai 1996) and calls for a transnational perspective on migration (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc 1994) marked early and foundational transitions away from seeing culture and place as homologous, towards more globalized understandings of the flows of people, goods, ideas, resources, and technologies. More recent articulations of migration as strategic and contested processes of socioeconomic and cultural inclusion and exclusion (Paerregaard 2008; Reichman 2011) are also useful ways to think about the diverse experiences of people who move from one place to another. The literature on modernity and South Asian migrations has yielded rich insights about the conditions of postcolonialism, the dynamics of global capitalism, and the formation of political consciousness as viewed from diasporic perspectives (Brown 2006; Osella and Gardner 2004).

Such scholarship demands that we pay attention to the points of continuity, connection, and rupture that occur through migration, and that we resist representations of transnational realities pitched in terms of a zero-sum game of assimilation and culture loss. As Levitt and Glick Schiller have put it, transnational migration is more productively engaged when "assimilation and enduring transnational ties are neither incompatible nor binary opposites" (2004: 1003). Instead, we would do well to see migration experience as a "kind of gauge which, while anchored, pivots between host land and transnational connections" (2004: 1003). Crucially, these (and other) scholars decouple the idea of "culture" or "society" from the boundaries of a single nation-state, setting aside what they call "methodological nationalism" (2004: 1007), even as they understand the importance of the nation-state as a powerful shaper of migrant realities.

Instead of arguing that the social formations engendered by transnational migration are unique, Levitt and Glick Schiller—akin to filmmaker John Akomfrah whose words open this chapter—emphasize that these social formations (for example, kinship, religious affiliation, or other aspects of identity) are not adequately or automatically captured by a "nation-state container view of society" (2004: 1006). Instead, they propose a "transnational social field" approach as a way of distinguishing between the "existence of transnational social

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networks" on the one hand and "the consciousness of being embedded in them", on the other (2004: 1006).

One of Levitt and Glick Schiller's core concepts within the social field approach is the distinction between *being* enmeshed in social networks and *belonging* to them, which includes "living simultaneously within and beyond the boundaries of a nation state" (2004: 1006, 1008). While ways of *being* reference the actual social relations, institutions, organizations, and practices in which people engage, ways of *belonging* describe practices that "signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group" and that are "less symbolic than concrete" (2004: 1010). They explain that a migrant who eats certain foods or engages in specific rituals because that is what his family has always done is indicative of transnational *being*, but not necessarily feeling a sense of *belonging* to a particular ethnicity or ancestral home. In contrast, *belonging*, they argue, often surfaces through memory, nostalgia, or imagination. This configuration is reflected in Sijapati's description of Nepali diasporic youth in Chapter 11 above, for example.

We are not fully convinced that such modes can be so easily disentangled. These distinctions could be conceived of in generational terms, but that would belie the ways that people at different stages of life and those enmeshed in distinct contexts across time and space can be transnational subjects and/or belong to an ethnically and/or nationally defined community or group. This is true for adult migrants from Mustang who, by virtue of their political consciousness and citizenship claims, as well as language, culture practices, and religious affiliation, are triangulated between being part of and belonging to (*i*) the nation-state of Nepal, (*ii*) diasporic Tibet, and (*iii*) geopolitical Tibet—having ties to those living just across the border from Mustang, in China. It is also true for their children, for whom the distinctions between the two frameworks for Tibetanness may well meld into one, while being American and feeling a sense of belonging in New York becomes its own category, its own social field.

Levitt and Glick Schiller argue that a social field approach allows for relationships between those who leave and those who stay behind to be explored with more grace and nuance than previous scholarship on transnational migration. Engaging social fields allows us to move beyond the idea that some people, usually the ones who stay behind,

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are living 'local' lives, while those who migrate are enmeshed in 'global' realities. Indeed, this concept is useful when considering how people from Mustang live in New York, especially those who came to the USA as adults. By virtue of the ways they spend their time, the people with whom they interact most (others from Nepal), and the languages they speak at work (often Nepali or Hindi in addition to English and Tibetan dialects), they are living what Conradson and McKay (2007) would call *translocal* lives. In addition, Mustangis are on the move in multiple directions in addition to the flows between Nepal and New York. These pathways include seasonal, regional, and life-cycle-related migrations between Mustang's villages, urban Nepal, and India for petty trade, pilgrimage, medical care, and schooling.

Even though the 'social field' concept and the dynamic relationships between being and belonging are good to think with, these perspectives could be enhanced by considering the cyclic nature of migration and paying closer attention to time and space. Here is where khora comes in. The term indicates the act of circumambulation. It also means transmigration, the cycles of birth, aging, sickness, and death through which we as sentient beings travel. Consonant with the Sanskrit *samsara*, cyclic existence, and, in other ways, the concept of *pradaksina*, clockwise circumambulation of a shrine, relic, or sacred site, khora can also signify taking one's turn, wandering, moving around, being surrounded or encircled, travelling through, hanging around, being drawn to, or apprehending something. It is an act that marks the many discrete 'lives' we live within this one human life. Khora reckons the passing of time, even as it is that passing. It stands for a wheel and also for the turning of a wheel. As a noun and a verb, khora sums up in its polysemy the interdependent nature of being and belonging.

Levitt and Glick Schiller's *being-belonging* distinction can be connected to Hausner and Gellner's (2012) discussion of religion as a *category* and a *practice*. Read one way, Levitt and Glick Schiller's definition of *being* as that which is consonant with collective identity and institutional belonging corresponds to Hausner and Gellner's idea of religion as a *category*, while Levitt and Glick Schiller's sense of *belonging* aligns with Hausner and Gellner's understanding of religion as a mode of *practice*—namely, "something less symbolic than concrete". And yet this distinction could be read the other way around. *Being*

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could be framed as that which is grounded in the everyday and therefore linked to *practice* (often at an individual level) while *belonging* could reference the aspirational statements or publically ascribed labels—in other words, *categories*—with which one aligns (often in connection to a sense of community or collectivity, broadly defined).

Such analytics of being and belonging are enhanced if we consider a distinction Shneiderman (2011) and Hausner (2016)—both writing about ethnicity, identity, and ritual expression among diasporic Nepalis—draw between *practice* and *performance*. For Shneiderman, practice evokes action done for oneself, while performance indexes action done for others, or with a specific audience in mind. Shneiderman's theoretical contribution is to point out how both spheres of action are "necessary for groups and individuals to maintain the pragmatic and emotional well-being that derives from a sense of belonging to a shared ... identity ... recognized by others" (2011: 208). Hausner (2016: 105) pushes for further analysis of the individual-collective dynamic that Shneiderman describes: "while an individual may engage in either ritual practice or in ritual performance ... a collective or association may really only engage in ritual performance," she argues. This is so, because, "when ritual is conducted for the sake of other human beings, there is a performative or self-conscious element that is, in a classic Durkheimian rendering, about confirming group identity". Even so, Hausner recognizes the value of ritual experience—practice—in a group setting.

How might we cast these dyads—category/practice; practice/performance; individual/collective—in relation to the concept of khora? As a form of collective ritual activity and daily religious experience khora is a practice; yet when framed as a way to understand process of migration, it can—indeed must, at least temporarily—become a more solitary performative act impressed upon immigration officers, government officials, lawyers, other family members, even as it aims to enable new forms of collective belonging in the long run, as one circles round again to a new time and place, a new present. Even though the khora—we could call it the pathway—of migration between Nepal and New York is occurring in an era increasingly marked by David Harvey's (1997) prescient observations about time-space compression, the act of khora itself presents something quite different than the compression of time and space. In fact, it is perforce a reuniting

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of time with space, not only because it can be a meditative act but also because it is about being in a particular place at a particular time—of day, of a year, of life—and, by being there, feeling a sense of belonging.

ORDINARY RITUALS, EXTRAORDINARY TIMES

When Hurricane Sandy's path of devastation moved through New York City in late October 2012, I worried about many friends, including those from Mustang now living in Brooklyn and Queens. Were they okay? What would they make of this devastation? How would they respond to this force of nature? Facebook messages provided some news: who had power, who was stuck at work, who needed water or help with childcare.

About twelve hours into this state of emergency, I received an email from Nawang in which he enclosed a panoramic photograph snapped with his phone. The image—taken by standing atop a pile of trunks and blankets in the corner of a living room in Brooklyn—revealed a crescent of people, most of them seated cross-legged on the ground. Of the eighteen individuals in this dimly lit space, four were men and two spun prayer wheels in their right hand while moving prayer beads through the fingers of their left hands. The rest sat with palms touching in the 'namaste' posture, mouths in motion, chanting Buddhist prayers. Instead of traditional wooden *phorwa* or china teacups—and likely because of the lack of electricity and, therefore, the inability to prepare tea—bottled water rested in front of most chanters. Containers of juice, sodas, and plates of snacks had been set on a coffee table. Nearly all of the women wore neither city clothes nor Tibetan finery as one might don for a Losar (New Year) party, but instead wore everyday *chuba* and the apron and cummerbund typical of Mustang villages.

Nawang explained that this gathering had not been a planned event such as the ones women from upper Mustang had begun organizing monthly, usually on the fifteenth day of the Tibetan lunar calendar, but was instead a spontaneous neighbourhood assembly, even though Sandy hit relatively close to the fifteenth Tibetan day of that month. It was also, more or less, a village assembly in that the majority of individuals gathered at this home were from a particular hamlet in upper Mustang. Ironically, the hurricane granted them a gift of time that

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Figure 12.2 People from one village in upper Mustang gather on American Thanksgiving for a community feast, card playing, socializing, and community forms of ritual practice.

Source: S. Craig (27 November 2014).

their normal work schedules would not have allowed. This was time to generate merit for the benefit of sentient beings at a moment of collective suffering, to 'time pass',[13] as Nepalis often describe activities to fill unstructured moments, and to use a form of religious practice as a way of cultivating a sense of belonging at a moment of uncertainty. For some who participated in this event, it reminded them of life in the village, of a time and a place that was defined in more immediate

[13] See Jeffrey (2010) on the phenomenon of 'time pass' among Indian youth, in a social context quite different than the one described here in terms of gender, locality, and class.

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ways by the cosmo-physical elements—earth, air, fire, water, and space—and their connection to life's unpredictabilities.

Culturally, Tibetan people are well versed in connections between natural disaster and religious practice. Consider rituals for warding off hailstorms (Klein and Sangpo 1997) or the propitiation of chthonic beings who reside in soil and water sources, in part to ensure good harvests (Ramble 1987; Samuel 1993). Or consider interpretations of the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal, as expressed by culturally Tibetan highlanders.[14] Interestingly, this event in New York was couched, Nawang later explained, within a set of conversations that included discussions of the moral, environmental, anthropogenic, and cosmological upsets that we might gloss as 'climate change in the Anthropocene'. During breaks from chanting, some questioned how this event might be related to experiences their relatives were having back in Mustang, where rivers were drying up, where summer rains were coming more heavily than winter snow.

Coupled with this trans-local identification was the sense, as Nawang put it, that, "after ten or fifteen years of living in New York, many now feel like this place is like their own home. So when there is destruction, they do what they would do at home, like this big mani ceremony. In this moment they showed and practised their own religion." The khora of migration evokes not only a virtual turn back to a daily rhythm of another place, but also the sense that one must honour, protect, and propitiate the place where one now lives, this village that is New York.

Nawang went on to distinguish events such as this mani gathering as moments of the practice of religion and the evocation of belonging in distinct ways from the more formal displays of wealth and prestige that go along with weddings, birthday parties, or seasonal festivals.

[14] Kristine Hildebrant, Geoff Childs, Mark Donohue, and Sienna Craig, along with Nepali researchers, including Nawang Tsering Gurung, have been exploring these topics through a collaborative research grant (NSF BCS/DEL RAPID 1547377), *Narrating Disaster*, which has documented survivors' experiences of living through these natural disasters, focusing on four highland regions of Nepal: Mustang, Manang, Nubri, and Tsum. See Childs et al. (forthcoming) and Hildebrandt et al. (forthcoming) for more information.

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At such events, identities converge and condense: people evoke being from Mustang in a general sense, along with being Nepali (for example, singing the popular Nepali song 'Jomsom ko Hawa' or speaking of UML and CPN-Maoist politics), and also align with generic displays of Buddhism and Tibetanness (for example, setting up altars bearing His Holiness the Dalai Lama's photograph, offering *kathag* scarves, gifts of food, and money to the hosts). "If we can have more moments like that [mani ritual during Sandy], when we can bring peace into each other's hearts ... if it is not about money, not a formal

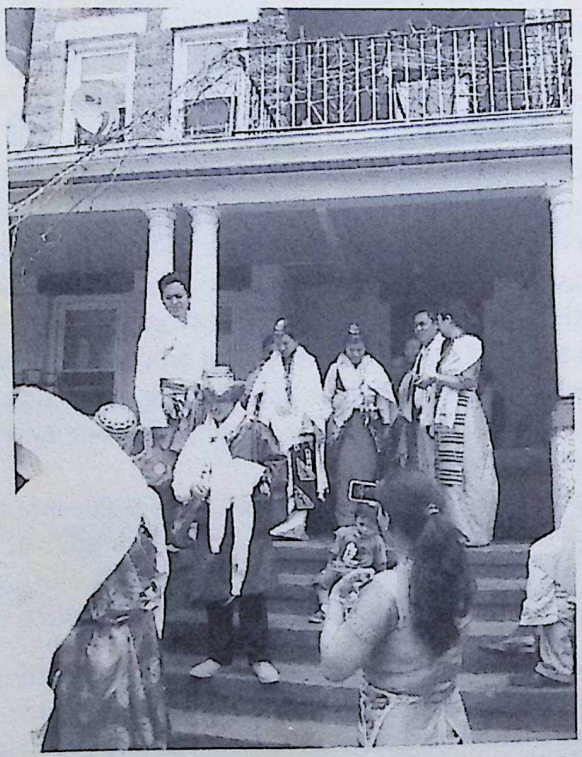

Figure 12.3 People from several upper Mustang villages gather in Sunnyside, Queens, for a wedding celebration, including the enactment of traditional practices of calling a new wife (T. *nama*) from her 'natal' home to her married residence.

Source: N. Gurung (2012).

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festival, it can be very beneficial," Nawang continued. But promoting such moments is difficult, given the bustle of the everyday, the relatively high social stakes involved in official celebrations, the fact that people from Mustang lack control over a space where they can gather collectively, and the quite constrained domestic spaces in which many people from Mustang live in New York.

FROM 'TIME PASS' TO 'NO TIME'

Whereas in Nepal it is quite common for people to refer to hanging out, chatting over tea, or even doing khora as a 'time pass' activity, in New York it is much more common to hear people speak about having no time and limited space for 'time pass'—that is, in this context, for relaxing with friends and family or for acts of ritualized contemplation. In the interviews Nawang and I conducted, we noted the ways that the cramped physical spaces in which Mustangis live belied their ability to carve out sacred space or to disaggregate distinct forms of wealth—a bronze statue of a root teacher, for instance, from a flat screen TV. Back in Mustang, regardless of socioeconomic standing, nearly all households designate at least one area in their home as a shrine room, a *chökhang*. Sometimes this room doubles as guest sleeping quarters or a place to host special visitors, but its primary identifying features, linguistically and materially, are connected to religion—religious inheritance, manifestations of lineage, scriptural libraries that makes it a place of practice. In the New York boroughs, however, most people have just one main room for socializing and worship, a space that doubles as a bedroom for some household members.

Even in these tenement conditions, altars are constructed and shrines are kept clean and at a level higher than one's head. The decorations on these altars are often quite standardized: a yellow or green holy umbrella symbol shelters whatever two- or three-dimensional icons the family can afford or have brought with them from Nepal; these shrines are draped in a *kathak* and are sometimes set on a bed of neat, clean, and shining clothes. This is a way of asking that health, prosperity, and well-being remain within the household. On the sides of such shrines people often display images of the Dalai Lama and other respected teachers, such as Sakya Trizin Rinpoche, the head of the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism, dominant in Mustang.

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Figure 12.4 Detail of a Mustangi-American household shrine in a Brooklyn apartment.

Source: S. Craig (July 2016).

In front of the shrines and images, slightly lower, people usually place seven water-offering bowls, flowers, and either a candle or a butter lamp and incense. Typically, one person in the family (often the senior-most woman in the household, but not exclusively) will empty the water bowls each evening at or after sunset, dry them with a clean towel, and place them upside down, only to fill them again by morning. For some individuals we interviewed, religion is also enacted through prostrations—even if only three at the start and end of each day—and carried on their persons in the form of amulets and sacred threads, tucked away from view but still ubiquitous. The majority of the individuals we interviewed or engaged in focus groups said they feel that religious practice is an important part of their daily life. Not only are shrines, common, despite the size of a home, but for many

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the morning and evening rituals associated with this space in their homes are, as one person put it, "like our daily basic needs, like eating". These simple patterns structure the bookends of the day and are a point of continuity between the rhythms of life in Nepal and in New York.

Such small and seemingly routine practices meet emotional daily needs as well, in the bustle and grind that is New York life. Most of the people interviewed for this project work 12+ hours per day. Some return home each day, while others live with their employers and return home only once a week. Lack of literacy and low education levels contribute to a situation in which many adult migrants work under the table or for the minimum wage even if they have proper documentation, such as work permits or green cards. The majority of the people we interviewed had been working in their current job for more than six years.

Many of the individuals interviewed noted that these simple acts of ritual practice help people reduce stress and 'mental disorders' or 'tension' from which they suffer in this new cultural and socioeconomic context, and encourage them to help all the sentient beings they encounter and to face their daily obstacles. That said, many of the interviewees also noted that, in the context of their work lives, 'religion is a private matter', not something they talk about or share with the other Americans with whom they interact and rarely something they talk about with others from Mustang, even if it is something they might *do together* at moments such as the mani gathering mentioned above. It may well be that this idea itself—seeing religion is a 'private matter' as opposed to a deeply social and collective phenomenon—has emerged through Mustangis' incorporation of American ideology about where 'religion' belongs. This seems markedly different from the ways that religious identity and transnational politics play out in Nepali diaspora social organizations and online forums, described in Chapters 10 and 11 above, and also different than the large-scale Buddhist teachings conducted by prominent Tibetan Buddhist leaders that take place in the USA, which people from Mustang attend when they can.

Even so, events such as the collective mani described above, provide powerful social and religious outlets. However, the one thing most of our interviewees and others really long for, is a place to walk around,

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a place to do khora. For many of these individuals, the possibility for religious practice—indeed what religious practice means—cannot be decoupled from circumambulation. Be it doing khora at Bauddha or around the base of Swayambhu, or even circumambulating the city of Lo Monthang, this embodied act of walking through daily samsara and, through this act, finding a sense of centre and making merit, is something that as yet cannot be reproduced in New York. Indeed, many people bemoan the mental and physical health problems that come from their lives of intense, repetitive physical labour that do not allow for this sort of measured, routine mind-body practice.

Nawang noted that interviewees over 30 often became particularly emotional when they described the obstacles they faced in practising their religion in New York City. All of those people interviewed said they wished to have a place to do khora, or that they missed this act expressly, as part of what they missed about being in Nepal. As one person reminded us, "We can make a shrine almost anywhere. We do it in Christian churches or Indian restaurants for our parties—for weddings or for Losar." While some interviewees acknowledged the presence of a Chinese Buddhist temple they could visit in Chinatown, or even somewhat ambiguous sites like the Rubin Museum of Himalayan and Tibetan Art, these were not really places they felt comfortable being devotional. (As an example of this, in 2015, the Rubin Museum recreated the shrine room of the palace in Lo Monthang. Although some Mustangis visited this installation with a sense of enacted devotion, for others this was a strange simulacra of cultural identity and belonging, about which they felt ambivalent.) And although some of those interviewed knew about or had visited some of the beautiful Tibetan Buddhist retreat centres in rural New England and upstate New York, they had made these pilgrimages only on special occasions, getting there at considerable personal expense and also having to juggle their demanding work schedules.

Since the time we conducted these interviews, two new community centres have been opened in Queens, one owned and operated by Sherpas (connected to the Sherpa kyidug mentioned by Sijapati) and another by exiled Tibetans. People from Mustang have connections to these institutions and can now rent them out for events. Many elders from Mustang participate in the Himalayan Elders Project that meets

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at the Sherpa gompa in Jackson Heights.[15] But this does not replace their desire for something to walk around, a place like a *stupa* where people can do khora and not look like they are "lost or crazy or talking to myself", as one man from upper Mustang explained. "If I go outside the house to say *mani*, then I feel myself as a street dog, since there is no place for *khora*." This sentiment points to a powerful paradox: through the larger physical and emotional pathway that is the khora of migration—it is not just a metaphor—the nature of khora as a daily practice in a specific place, as a way of connecting to that place, have been excised from routine, often evoking sadness, nostalgia, or emotional distress.

Nawang reflected on some of these dynamics as he wrote up his field notes. He noted how an individual migrant's situation—from the daily stress (physical and emotional) involved in working in New York, to a sense of financial responsibility especially to family members back in Nepal, to generational tensions that emerge, in part, through the dynamics of a remittance economy—seemed to shape that individual's relationship to religious practice. Nawang noted that especially for older migrants who take Buddhist practice seriously, even *talking* about religion requires a kind of mental acuity that some find very difficult to maintain given the quotidian realties of everyday life, including the khora that is traced when one's hopes, resources, and heart-mind travel the distances between Nepal and New York.

***

On a warm spring day in 2013, Nawang and I visit Dolma. Her father died recently. We arrive bearing gifts: fruit, nuts, some money wrapped in a kathak. Just as Nawang is my 'little brother', Dolma is my 'sister'. We have been fictive kin (Tb. *rokmo*, Np. *mithini*) since I first lived in her home in Lo Monthang 20 years ago. At this moment, Dolma's husband Kunsang is back in Nepal, waiting out his own father's passing, as mentioned in one of the ethnographic snapshots that began this chapter. This is a difficult time for the family. Dolma's father

[15] See Figures 11.1 and 11.2 (pp. 257–8 above), and himalayaneldersproject.org/.

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lived, and died, in Tibet. Dolma was born in the Tibet Autonomous Region and lived there until she came to Mustang as a teenager, not as a refugee but as an extended family member of a Tibetan who married into the royal family of Lo.

While Dolma's eldest daughter serves us tea, my friend cries tears of grief and frustration. Even if they could afford the cost of air passage to Lhasa, even if her husband had not been away, Dolma is in no position to return to her natal homeland. The challenges of money, language, geopolitics, and competing family obligations loom large, made more difficult by the khora of migration that has shaped her life. In this sense, Dolma's 'stuckness'—her inability to return to Tibet or to move with much freedom through New York, where she now lives—illustrates how patterns of global migration are distinct from doing khora, be it khora around the Bauddha stupa, or even khora in the larger sense of cyclic existence. Circumambulating a monument—spinning prayerbeads through fingers, chatting or praying quietly, experiencing a sense of collective effervescence at the dawn or remains of a day—or contemplating sentience from the perspective of samsara reminds us of our shared and equal humanity. In contrast, in the political economy of transnational migration, we are certainly not all equal.

As we prepare to leave, a group of ten women from various villages in upper Mustang arrive to pay their respects. We note that Dolma neither has room in her tiny two-bedroom apartment (in which six adults live) nor enough teacups to host these people properly. Her husband is away, her son-in-law is at work, and she had to balance caring for the children of other Mustangi women (her source of income) against playing hostess at a moment of anguish. In a village setting or in the relatively spacious homes some Mustangis keep in Pokhara or Kathmandu, this practice of welcoming delegations of visitors can be stressful, but they also provide real household assistance and emotional support at a time of need. In New York such ritualized acts of community belonging become a new kind of burden for my friend. This is coupled with the emotional weight of marking a death that occurred halfway around the world, in a place to which she desperately wishes she could circle back.

This chapter has offered reflections on everyday religion and points of change and continuity as people from Mustang settle in New

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York. It has explored how individual and collective efforts to foster cultural continuity and religious practice articulate with the daily experiences of living and labouring in New York. We have shown how the concept of khora serves as a useful framework for conceptualizing transnational being and belonging. These diverse experiences of people from Mustang now in New York reveal with granular specificity what it means to be culturally Tibetan as well as Nepali and, to varying degrees, American. Our interlocutors simultaneously belong to a household, a village, and a particular region of Mustang District. These lines of belonging can come to map onto the neighbourhood one lives in or the employment one finds. Many remain bound to the nation-state of Nepal even as they align themselves with globally recognized signs of Tibetanness and strive to gain legal status in the United States. Some have become consummate New Yorkers. Yet regardless of what papers one has (or doesn't have), what labour one performs, where one's children live and are educated, what languages one speaks, or what forms of economic and social capital one accrues and spends, the desire for emotional well-being and belonging, for familiar cultural forms and a respite from exhaustion, loneliness, and insecurity, remains crucial.

This vignette with which we close this chapter references a loved one who passed away in his homeland. At present the number of people from Mustang who have died in the USA remains relatively low, but demographic trends indicate that such events will increase in the coming years. Even with the increasing trend of entire families migrating, sometimes bringing with them the knowledge of ritual specialists, finding people to perform death rituals is a tricky challenge (cf. Gurung, Chapter 15 in this volume), and people often end up settling on someone who is not ideal in terms of the specifics of their religious affiliation: a Bönpo family finds a Sakya lama, for example. The weekly rituals during the 49 days of the *bardo* must be realigned according to work schedules and days off. Yet such ritual enactments get done. They also travel a certain kind of khora of their own: a monk living in Brooklyn performs a weekly death ritual for a man who died in the village of Dhi; a householder priest (*ngakpa*) conducts a purification ritual in the village of Ghami for a baby born in a Jersey City maternity ward. In noting such experiences, I recall the lines of Tsering Wangmo Dhompa's poem which opened this

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chapter: *Semblance of what is .../Communication efforts require the right initiative./Somewhere along the line matters/of motion and rest are resolved.*

POSTSCRIPT

Since this article was initially written, several notable changes have occurred to the ethnographic context described herein. First, one of the main Mustang-New York social service organizations has begun collecting contributions towards the purchase of a building (likely to be located in Queens) that will serve as a community centre. Although such a building remains to be purchased, capital accumulation has been significant. Second, as the Sherpa community centre in Queens has become more established, some elderly migrants have begun walking around the square city block on which this structure is located—an improvised khora—in addition to benefitting from the Himalayan Elders Project. Finally, while loneliness and disconnection remain abiding issues for many Mustangi migrants, the use of new social media platforms such as WeChat have opened up new lines of communication across trans-local scales. Although it is not the same as 'being there', such devices facilitate new forms of connection through audio and video messaging as well as the broadcast of Buddhist teachings. This virtual reinforcement of being and belonging is particularly powerful for those who are illiterate or semi-literate. Even so, these forms of social media have also become a new locus of airing community disagreements and gossip, practices that reinforce intergenerational tension and raise further questions about belonging and well-being.

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PART III

THE NEW DIASPORA 2: ETHNICITY, CASTE, AND RELIGION IN THE UK

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13

COUNTING OURSELVES

CNSUK'S 2008 SURVEY OF NEPALIS IN THE UK

Krishna P. Adhikari and *Chandra Kumar Laksamba*

BETWEEN 2004 AND 2007 THE UK's Nepali population increased dramatically but the actual figures were not known and many wild estimates circulated.[1] So, in 2008 the Centre for Nepal Studies UK (CNSUK) and the Non-Resident Nepali Association UK (NRNAUK) conceived and implemented an ambitious partnership project to systematically understand the size and nature of the Nepali population. Relying entirely on internal resources—the growing network of organizations and personal links within the Nepali community—a large-scale survey, popularly referred to as a 'census', was conducted. The first of its kind among the UK Nepali population, or indeed among Nepali diaspora communities anywhere, the study revealed the size and dynamics of the Nepali population and assessed its level of integration

[1] We are grateful to Dr Govinda Dahal, Dr Rajubabu Shrestha, Mr Lokendra Dhakal, Mr Ananda Bhandari, and Mr Shree Baral who were part of the research team, and NRNAUK and other research partner institutes and individuals for their support in the collection of the data.

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in the UK. The results were published both in local newspapers (CNSUK 2010; CNSUK 2011; K.P. Adhikari 2010) and, more discursively and analytically, in book form (Adhikari 2012). The baseline information has already proved useful for community members, for policymakers, and for academic researchers. In this chapter we aim to present an account of the aspirations, process, experience, and lessons of the project in the hope that it will serve as a useful model for diaspora communities elsewhere. Our focus is to present a case study of the methods used as an innovative tool for self-study, as well as to present the socio-demographic results, combined with some updates from the 2011 UK census (ONS 2012a). In addition, we hope to provide important contextual information for, and a complement to, the chapters that follow on the UK Nepali community.

CONVERGING IDEAS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

When Googling for the Nepali population in the UK, one is most likely to end up being greeted by Wikipedia pages. One Wikipedia page, based on the work of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the government agency that administers the census in England and Wales, reported 42,000 Nepalis in the UK in 2012.[2] Until 2007 there were no such figures available as Nepali residents in the UK were not included in the ONS list of 60 most common countries by birth or previous nationality. In spite of this, around 2007, various Nepali organizations and individuals attempted estimates as to the size of the Nepali population, ranging from 50,000 to 130,000. The NRNA (International) website gave the UK Nepali population as 30,000.[3] These figures were not only inconsistent but also markedly higher than the 2001 UK census figures of 5,943 (based on country of birth) and 2001 Nepal census figure of 7,221 (counted as absent from Nepal with the UK as the destination) (Kansakar 2003). CNSUK decided to

2 Available at: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalis_in_the_United_Kingdom. Accessed on 12 June 2012.

3 Available at: www.nrn.org. Accessed on 1 July 2012. NRNA later updated its website replacing the Nepali population figure with that supplied by the CNSUK based on the research being discussed.

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carry out the survey in 2008 in order to confront and try to resolve these discrepancies and uncertainties. The survey was popularly referred to as a 'census' of Nepalis in the United Kingdom, because it aspired to include as many people as possible, but, as we will show later, the study was in fact a large survey.

It is one thing to formulate the idea of surveying an entire ethnic minority community, but very different to carry it out. The main reason why minority communities have not conducted similar surveys in the past must be a lack of resources, since recently migrated populations are unlikely to have the necessary manpower and/or the financial resources required. A number of factors contributed to the decision to conduct this ambitious project in the UK, mainly: (*i*) the rapidly rising Nepali population, (*ii*) the emergence of many new Nepali organizations, (*iii*) the availability of expertise within the community, and (*iv*) the aspiration of Nepalis to be recognized as a distinct group within UK society, especially with the approach of the Census 2011.[4]

Until 1990, the UK Nepali population was very small and mainly consisted of professionals and restaurateurs. In the 1990s more people came in as students; asylum-seekers began to arrive after the start of the Maoist insurgency in 1996. Their numbers further increased in the 2000s. It was particularly in 2004, when the British Government allowed post-1997 retired British Gurkhas to settle in the UK, that there began an exponential rise in the size of the Nepali population in the UK, particularly between 2006 and 2011, though with some fluctuations. The Nepalis in that period became one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the country; however, the increase was by no means as fast as some European immigrant communities. For example, between 2004 and 2007 the Polish population in the UK increased about 4.5-fold reaching 405,000. The Portuguese population also increased significantly in this period.[5] For the first time, towards the beginning of 2008, the ONS entered Nepalis in the list of residents of

[4] One of the goals of the survey was to have 'Nepali' accepted as an ethnic category in the UK Census 2011.

[5] Computed based on the ONS's migration statistics based on country of birth of 2004 and 2007.

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the 60 most common foreign countries of birth or nationality (Office for National Statistics 2011). As a result of the surge in their population, Nepalis living in the UK were not ready to accept the population figure shown by the 2001 UK census which they thought greatly undercounted the actual population (CNSUK 2010). In addition, the awareness that there had been a sudden rise in the Nepali population since 2004 triggered community aspirations to receive distinct recognition of their place in Britain.

In March 2005, the NRNAUK was formed under the chairmanship of Mahanta Shrestha (see Chapter 18 of this volume). Subsequently, in 2006, a newly elected committee of the NRNAUK led by Ashok Shrestha was interested in contributing something meaningful towards the welfare of the Nepali population in the UK. Around the same time a group of freshly graduated doctoral scholars and other experienced social scientists formed a research institute, the CNSUK. It was led by Dr Govinda Dahal, a demographer and expert on social statistics, along with Dr Chandra Laksamba, Achut Gautam, Dr Krishna Adhikari, Lokendra Dhakal, Ananda Bhandari, Shree Baral, and later joined by Dr Rajubabu Shrestha. Laksamba was also a newly elected vice-chairman of the NRNAUK. CNSUK members were struck by the lack of good statistics on Nepalis in the UK and were motivated to put their skills to work for the benefit of the community. For CNSUK it was a huge and demanding project to take on alongside their day jobs. Fortunately, the interests and priorities of the NRNAUK and CNSUK not only converged, but also complemented each other in terms of resources and capabilities. By 2006, a number of large and tightly knit ethnic, region-based, and professional community groups had come into existence. Their presence and enthusiasm added value to the project idea as they were seen both as vital resources for obtaining access and interested end-users of the research. Within these (mostly) newly formed organizations, among others, the appeal to 'Nepali identity' proved to be very effective.

Ethnic Motivation

When Nepalis came to the UK in large numbers, they mostly settled in areas where there already were other Asians. They realized that their neighbours, that is, the Chinese, Indians, Bangladeshis, and

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Pakistanis, benefited from being recognized officially as an ethnic category. The most frequent encounter that Nepalis had was while filling out an application form for a job or other purposes in which an ethnic category was required. They were immediately confronted by options for Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Chinese; they themselves were forced to tick the somewhat confusing residual box 'Any Other Asian'. This made them want to have their own straightforward ethnic category. Having a separate Nepali category was perceived to be convenient in dealing with bureaucracy and, more importantly, would mean being recognized as an ethnic minority group like their neighbours. Population size is certainly one, though not the only, important basis for claiming recognition as a separate ethnic group. Above all, the proper establishment of the population is important for allocating national resources to local councils and eventually to the communities concerned. With these thoughts in mind, the Nepali community realized that they had to make a proper case to claim their own ethnic category, as well as for the rightful resource allocation which was believed to have been inhibited by the lack of proper statistics, official or otherwise. Community leaders responded to these arguments; and they recognized that the issue was also a powerful tool to mobilize people both at individual and at collective levels.

The fact that the idea of working towards an ethnic minority category was well received by the community has also, to some extent, to do with the growing influence of ethnic movements in Nepal, even though ethnicity in the UK would only mean at the broader level of Nepali identity. At an initial point during the survey, a small number of people in the UK linked to ethnic activist groups in Nepal suggested that they should seek to register their ethnicity (for example, 'Rai' rather than 'Nepali'). They thought that seeking to register a broader Nepali category could prevent the future prospects of being recognized at the sub-ethnic level. However, even UK Sikh activists failed to achieve recognition as an ethnic category distinct from 'Indian'. Sikhs claim to number 600,000 in the UK; when counted under the optional religion question in the 2011 census, they were revealed to number 423,000 in England and Wales (BBC 2010; Office for National Statistics 2012b). Thus, the prospects of seeking recognition at the Nepali sub-national level for ethnic groups with a population of, at most, 25,000 was certainly not a plausible proposition.

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The idea disappeared as soon as it was raised without becoming an active part of anyone's agenda within the UK Nepali community.

At the same time, these Nepali ethnic associations were growing in number, with an active membership and a presence in many parts of the UK. Only a special study such as that proposed by CNSUK would be able to identify and enumerate each ethnic group within the wider Nepali population. The UK census would not be able to do this. The proposed Nepali survey would fulfil this aim of the ethnic organizations.

As the survey results later indicated, within the UK's Nepali population over 60 per cent are either ex-Gurkhas or their immediate families (Adhikari et al. 2012: 47). Thus it is perhaps not surprising that a few individuals were keen to have 'Gurkha' as well as 'Nepali' propagated as the relevant ethnic category. It was suggested that this would achieve a relatively quicker and more immediate recognition, given the long history of a connection with Britain and the deep affection with which most British people regard the Gurkhas. The very recent achievement of settlement rights for Gurkhas seemed to show that the Gurkhas' allegiance to Britain was proven and accepted. One commentator put it this way: "It's clear that these brave men are the very foreigner that we the British Public want to invite and embrace and allow into our country rather than the illegals and criminals who have not paid a penny, don't want to lift a finger and only want to exploit our easy going benefit system" (Gaunty 2008: 105).[6]

The suggestion to go for 'Gurkha' as an ethnic group name was, in the end, rejected. Both CNSUK and NRNAUK advocated 'Nepali' instead of 'Gurkha' for various reasons. The term 'Gurkha' is not inclusive in the UK context, since it refers only to that section of Nepalis who served in the British Army. In fact, taken strictly, it does not cover even their family members, who can only be identified as Nepalis. At the time of the survey, as the survey results revealed, ex-Gurkha soldiers made up only 17 per cent of the Nepali population. In the UK context, Nepalis see 'Gurkha' primarily as a profession; and it is only

6 In fact Nepalis were not universally welcomed. In Aldershot, a military town, when it seemed that local GP services were struggling to cope with the newcomers, Nepalis faced considerable hostility (see Adhikari 2011; Gellner 2014; Pariyar, Chapter 17, this volume).

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possible to become a Gurkha by first being a Nepali. All Gurkhas are Nepalis (and the vast majority were born in Nepal), but not all Nepalis in the UK are Gurkhas. After informal discussions with members of CNSUK, it was agreed within CNSUK and NRNAUK that 'Nepali' (or its variant form 'Nepalese') was the only inclusive identity.[7]

To everyone's surprise, an enquiry made by the CNSUK with the ONS revealed that the 2011 UK census had made provision for 'Gurkha' as an ethnic category. Even more surprisingly, we were told that, if people indicated Gurkha as their ethnic group, it would not be added to the main 'Nepali' group whereas other alternative responses to the prompt 'Other' (for example 'Nepal' or 'Nepalese') would be amalgamated.[8] It may be assumed that the ONS had consulted someone from a military background who had limited knowledge about Nepal and Nepalis in general. However, with persistent arguments from CNSUK that 'Gurkha' is not an ethnic group (in Nepal), eventually the ONS relented. When the census results were published, all alternatives, including Gurkha, were aggregated together within the main category.

METHODS AND ADMINISTRATION

The availability of resources, as already noted, determined what types of methods and processes of implementation could be applied to the study. Academic advice was forthcoming from advisors at Oxford, Southampton, and Surrey, but in the timeframe required there was no possibility of mobilizing university or research council resources. This meant that CNSUK had to rely on resources internal to the community itself.

7 In the run-up to the UK 2011 census, during the awareness campaign conducted by CNSUK, there was not a single demand for, or enquiry about, 'Gurkha' as a category from members of the Nepali community. However, there was an enquiry from a native British man who had served in the British and Indian Gurkhas, acting as an advisor to a grouping of Nepali Janajati groups, and his proposal was to write 'Nepalese', rather than 'Nepali', under 'Other'.

8 Email correspondence with ONS on 22 March 2011 seeking clarification about the use of terms in questions 15, 16, and 18, and options on religion.

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Migration is often a chain process and people who have migrated to a new destination try to join or form relational networks (Schrover and Vermeulen 2005). At the beginning, such networks are often loose and people keep in touch with each other on an individual-to-individual basis. This phenomenon was evident in the Nepali community as people connected to each other first by means of informal networks and only later formalized them as organizations. As mentioned above, by 2006 there existed several Nepali community-based organizations in the UK. Even though there was no frame of reference with regards to size or location of the population, tracing people was possible because of the availability of interwoven informal and formal networks. This connectivity appeared to be a productive resource or 'social capital' which, as survey-takers, we could take advantage of.

Despite its weak structure and recent founding, the NRNAUK, as a champion of the idea, was best placed to bring these scattered resources together. Along with the NRNAUK, several leading organizations such as the Magar Association UK, Kirat Yakthung Chumlung UK, Sherpa Association UK, Srijanshil Nepali Society, Greater Reading Nepalese Community Association, Pragatishil Nepali Samaj, Burnt Oak Nepalese Community, Sagarmatha Gurkha Community, and the Nepal Embassy, endorsed the programme, extended financial support, and/or helped with data collection. The NRNAUK formed a special steering committee led by its vice chairman Angkal Jung Lama to coordinate the data collection process. All four UK-based Nepali weekly newspapers that existed at the time (*Nepali Patra*, *Nepali Sandesh*, *Naya Sandesh*, and *Everest Times*),[9] Nepali TV, and British Forces Broadcasting Services (BFBS) Gurkha radio joined forces to publicize the project. Over 200 individuals, businesses, and social organizations took part in the study either by helping to fill survey forms, and/or by entering data, and/or providing financial support. The list of those who helped to identify new respondents through a snowballing process stood in four digits. Of the overall estimated project cost of £313,447, £16,480 in cash was raised through community efforts; the remainder consisted of voluntary contributions from

9 Since 2011 *Nepali Sandesh* and *Naya Sandesh* have ceased to appear in print form; several other online news portals have started up.

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community members and CNSUK's officials, either in kind or in terms of time contributed.

Obtaining details about every person of Nepali origin living in the UK was the primary aim of doing the 'census'. However, a number of factors forced this original aim to be modified: the lack of any pre-existing frame of reference (sampling frame and locations of respondents); limited time and financial resources; and the wholly voluntary nature of participation. The original ambitions for the research were scaled back. The aim of coming up with a headcount was retained as was the objective of trying to capture key community characteristics by means of an in-depth household survey of a selected subset of respondents. The objective of obtaining the overall population size was met through a different improvised method of estimation by towns and cities; as a consequence, the study, initially popularized as a 'census', became in fact a large-scale survey. To qualify as a census, according to the United Nations, a study needs to have four features: "individual enumeration, universality within a defined territory, simultaneity, and defined periodicity" (United Nations 2008: 8). The present study had its universe limited to Nepalis in the UK, and it did not enumerate all individuals within that universe; or rather, the final head count was produced using a mix of different methods.

The study followed an evolutionary trajectory and went through five interconnected phases: conceptualization of research, designing the instrument testing, delivery and administration, estimating the overall population, and final stage of reporting and advocacy. Rather than delving into the generic phases, here we attempt to introduce two more important and innovative aspects: comparison of survey instruments with standard England and Wales census questionnaires (2011) and the process involved in the estimation of population.

The study comprised three interconnected yet separate samples, as shown in Figure 13.1. The samples were: (*i*) a household listing with a population of 18,508; (*ii*) an in-depth household survey of a sub-set of (*i*) (population of 7,881); and (*iii*) an estimate of the total population (72,173). The first sample covered a limited set of variables such as sex, ethnicity, family size, and place of residence, whereas the second was far more detailed, covering household information, individuals' biographies, education and employment, religion, migration, health, organizations, integration, and maternal health. The first

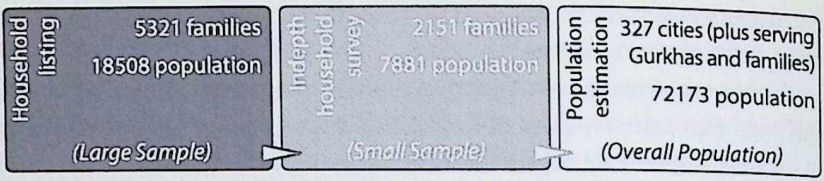

Figure 13.1 Two samples and an estimate in the 2008 CNSUK survey of UK Nepalis.

Source: Adhikari (2012).

sample enabled us to ask and answer the questions about the internal ethnic composition of the Nepali population. The second and third sets taken together got as close as possible under the circumstances to a full census.

In this connection it is worth comparing the 2008 survey with the results of the 2011 England and Wales census questionnaire (Table 13.1). While standard census elements were borrowed to make the 2008 survey comparable with the census figures, the questionnaire was tailored to specific community needs by adapting the alternatives suitable to the community. A prime example of this is the question on religion: in the optional question on religion, the UK census allows respondents to tick only one religion (including the non-religious category). This fails to reflect the practices of people of Nepali origin some of whom, as discussed further below, follow more than one religious practice (Gellner and Hausner 2013).

The UK census is compulsory and non-participation is punishable by law, whereas the CNSUK's survey was voluntary and only guided by de facto community compliance. The UK census data are published after 100 years, whereas there is no provision (as yet) for the CNSUK data to be released and they are governed by the UK Data Protection Act enforced through registration with the Information Commissioner's Office. Because the CNSUK survey was optional, only the minimum necessary information was asked for, and people were given the option to omit questions to which they did not wish to respond. We asked respondents to indicate only the month and year of their birth or to simply mention their age in completed years, because the date of birth is a sensitive issue and there was no need for

Table 13.1 Comparison of census 2011 and survey 2008

Questions	UK census 2011 (England and Wales)	CNSUK survey 2008
Household	Household details with residents; types of housing, ownership/tenancy type, number of rooms, central heating, cars, and others; address	All residents (but allowing residents' names to be withheld if desired); housing: most of the same questions (excluding those related to car). Address optional **Added**: Plans to buy house; use of internet; optional: phone number and email address
Individual	Name; sex; date of birth; marital status; second address; student status; country of birth; date arrived UK; health status and care; general health status and disability; national identity; passport held; ethnic group, main language, level of spoken English, address previous year; disability; qualifications; employment status and details	**Included**: Most aspects, but no full date of birth or arrival in the UK; **Excluded**: Second address; national identity; main language; address last year; passport holding; detailed nature or length about work; **Added**: ethnicity (in Nepal), multiple religious choice/mixed religion; watching/reading English media; qualifications: education and personal training; international students; plans to leave the UK
Visitor	Visitors details included	Not included
Integration	No questions	Security, mixing, political participation, voting, problems faced in the community
Organization	No questions	Participation in organizations, types, activities attended
Maternal Health	No questions	Age at marriage; children born, died, alive

Source: Adhikari (2012) and ONS (2012a).

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the study to ask for this. Similarly, we did not ask for any information on visitors, nor did we count them in the overall population.

Normally, a census is carried out keeping a particular date as a point of reference for counting the population, even if there is subsequent follow up to ensure the participation of as many people as possible. The CNSUK's survey was conducted throughout the calendar year of 2008; for the purpose of counting the overall population, we used 31 December 2008 as a point of reference.

The survey questionnaire had questions about organizations, level of social integration, and maternal health issues that are not included in the UK census. Understanding the circumstances related to the integration of Nepalis in the UK was also an important motivation behind carrying out this study in the first place. Furthermore, asking people to voluntarily provide their telephone numbers made it possible to produce the publication *Directories of Nepalis in the UK* in successive editions in 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2015 (CNSUK 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015). These small books have become vital resources for the Nepali community and beyond, not only for accessing information but also in promoting social capital through increased connectivity and resultant cooperation at both individual and institutional levels.

Early on in the process of research it became clear that it was not going to be possible to obtain a form from every Nepali in the country. The first two samples on their own provide much information but could not provide us with the total population size. Other methods were required. First, the population of serving Gurkhas and their families was obtained under the Freedom of Information Act from the Headquarters Brigade of Gurkhas (HQBG). Then, identification of other populations made use of the contacts that had been formed while carrying out the other two samples. We established that there were Nepalis residing in 327 towns and cities, including various towns within the Greater London area. The list of contacts we had was mostly of the leaders of various community organizations where they existed. We contacted five key informants from each site (except that in places with small populations, we contacted one or two only). We asked them to research and give us a best possible count of the population in their sites. We first compared the five independent estimates. Where the deviation was high, we asked them to refine their estimates. Being community leaders, many key informants had

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a ready figure to hand. A few sites with larger populations were broken down into area segments to facilitate the estimation. Then we averaged the figures to come to a final estimate. Our analysis showed that the larger the city/town, the larger the level of error in the (over) estimation. We estimated that the error margin ranged between 0 and 15 per cent. Overall, this pragmatic method, which owes something to the rapid rural appraisal advocated by Chambers (1983), seemed fit for the original purpose.

RESULTS

The detailed results of the survey and other related statistics have been published elsewhere (Adhikari 2012; CNSUK 2012); here we summarize the most important results, along with some secondary information where available.

1. **Specifying Population**: The survey showed that by the end of 2008 the Nepali population in the UK was 72,173 and that earlier statistics from various sources were far from being accurate, especially the 2001 UK census figure. One must recognize that there is likely to be some element of error in this figure and that the actual figure could be slightly lower. Since then there has been a further surge in immigration, mainly due to changes in the immigration rules in 2009 allowing ex-Gurkhas, who had four years or more service and retired before 1997, to come and settle. The arrival of over 12,000 students and their dependents in 2009 and 2010 also pushed the population up. However, a large number of them left the UK between 2011 and 2015 due to strict immigration policies. Hence, the Nepali population in the UK has increased since 2008, but not by as much as many Nepalis claim. The 2011 UK census gives a total Nepali population in England and Wales of 60,202. Similarly, the Scottish Census 2011 records that 1,268 people born in Nepal live in Scotland.[10] Given the general tendency of immigrants and ethnic minority groups in the UK

[10] The population by Nepali ethnicity (including Gurkha) is even lower: 1,232.

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not to participate fully in censuses, the recent census result is low, but is not surprisingly so. These figures prove, as we had long argued, that the ONS's previous figures (annual estimation by country of birth, and previous nationalities, as well the number in the 2001 census) were wrong (Adhikari 2013a, 2013b; Adhikari et al. 2012).

2. **Immigration Categories**: Nepalis entered the UK under four main immigration categories: British Gurkha soldiers, Students, Work and Employment (non-army), and 'others', which includes both British National Overseas (BNO-Hong Kong) and asylum seekers. Of the total population counted, over 60 per cent were Gurkhas and people related to them. Between 2004 and 2010, a total of 19,025 students and their dependents came to the UK from Nepal but many of them have already left the country. In the same period, 5,205 came under employment-related visas or as dependents.[11] The number of those who arrived as BNOs is not separately available from immigration sources, but one in 10 Nepalis in our survey were born in Hong Kong.
3. **Geographical Distribution**: The study showed that Nepalis were spread across 327 towns/cities of all four countries of the United Kingdom. They have reached all nine regions of England, and in total were residing in 65 counties, districts, or unitary authority areas. As with other ethnic minorities in the UK, they are overwhelmingly concentrated in England (96 per cent). The 2011 census results confirm those of the 2008 survey while providing more precision. More than one third of Nepalis live in and around (outer) London while two fifths live in South-East England. About 50 per cent of the population is found in the following ten areas (in population

[11] On 28 January 2002 the UK Government started a points-based Highly Skilled Migrants Programme (HSMP), on which people satisfying the required number of points could come and work in the UK without having any specific job offer, which was essential for the work permit system. HSMP and its new avatar, Tier 1 General Migrants programme, have now been closed. The previous Work Permit system as an immigration category, was replaced in November 2008 by a point-based system Tier 2 (General).

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order, largest first): Rushmoor, Greenwich, Brent, Reading, Ealing, Hounslow, Shepway, Ashford, Hillingdon, and Harrow (of these only Rushmoor, Reading, Shepway, and Ashford are not in London). Of the 326 areas identified in England and Wales by the recent census results, 75 per cent have fewer than 100 Nepali inhabitants. Despite the tendency to concentrate, the Nepali population, according to recent Census results, is nowhere more than 6.5 per cent of the local population.

Even in Rushmoor (Aldershot and Farnborough)—where in January 2011 the size of the Nepali population became a political issue when the local MP, Gerald Howarth, wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister, complaining that local social services were unable to cope (Adhikari, K.P. 2011; Rushmoor Borough Council 2011)—Nepalis comprise just 6.5 per cent of the total population. Census results show that, in fact, the council's total population rose only by 2,828 (3.3 per cent) between 2001 and 2011, and that the present Nepali population of Rushmoor stands at 6,131 (Office for National Statistics 2012a). This figure has been disputed and some claim that there are over 9,000 Nepalis, constituting about 10 per cent population in Aldershot and Farnbourgh areas (*GetHampshire* 2012).[12] Even though some people were in all probability missed out by the census, it is implausible to assume that the missing figure is so high as to make the population of Nepalis living in Rushmoor Borough in excess of 9,000.

4. **Origin**: Nepalis in the UK were born in 16 different countries. 80 per cent were born in Nepal, 10 per cent in Hong Kong, and 5 per cent in the UK. Small numbers were born in countries such as Brunei, India, Malaysia, Singapore, and Germany. In Nepal, they come from 64 of Nepal's 75 districts but the majority are from the hill districts which are the traditional

[12] Local MP Gerald Howarth expressed his dismay at the 2011 census results: "Given that we have gone from practically nothing to around 10% of the entire population being of Nepalese origin, how can they say the population has only grown by 3%? I find it pretty inexplicable and I'm sure my constituents would find that too. I do not think people will buy into that" (Adhikari, K.P. 2013a).

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sites of Gurkha recruitment. 75 per cent come from 15 districts, including Kaski, Kathmandu, Sunsari, Myagdi, and Syangja.[13]

5. **Demographic Phenomena**: The study revealed a relatively balanced sex composition of the population (53 per cent male, 47 per cent female) and is very close to the 2011 Census results in England and Wales (55 per cent male and 45 per cent female).[14] Age-wise, the population was dominated by economically active people with a mean age 28 years; the population of between 18 to 60 years old was 70 per cent. The population of over 60 was only 5 per cent and children under 16 were 25 per cent of the overall population. However, since 2009, with the arrival of pre-1997 retired Gurkhas, the population composition has been changing; the elderly now comprise a much larger proportion of the Nepali population. Nonetheless, the 2011 census of England and Wales results show very close figures in terms of distribution of population by age groups. This might indicate the non-inclusion of large number of elderly Gurkhas in the UK census. Thanks to the Gurkha recruitment policy, the caste/ethnicity composition is markedly different from that of Nepal (see Figure 13.2). Gurungs, Magars, Rais, and Limbus together form only 12.83 per cent of Nepal's population; at 67.07 per cent, their proportion within the UK's Nepali population is more than five times as high. Overall, 26 caste or ethnic groups were found in the UK, compared to 125 listed in the 2011 census in Nepal.
6. **Multi-religious Practices**: The results of religion are also very different from the Nepal's figures, for three reasons: (*i*) the types and ratio of ethnic mix which, as shown above, is very different from that of Nepal; (*ii*) new ethno-political anti-Hindu

[13] Relatively few Nepalis from the plains region (Tarai-Madhesh) have migrated to the UK. Sunsari is a combined plains and hill district, and includes the hill town of Dharan, where many ex-Gurkha soldiers had settled, having migrated from other districts of the eastern hills.

[14] This is in strong contrast to Nepali populations in countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and India where women are discouraged from migrating mainly for security reasons.

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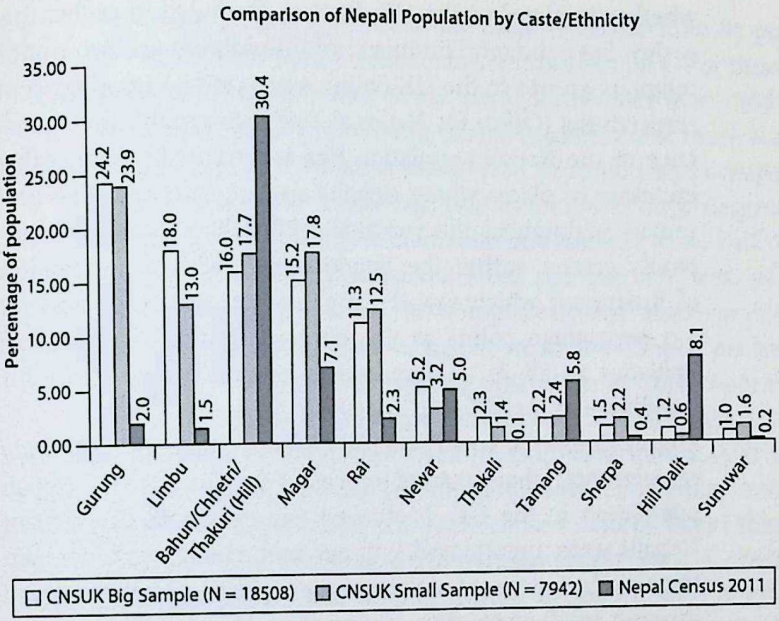

Figure 13.2 Nepali population by ethnicity, comparing the UK and Nepal.

Source: CNSUK survey samples (2008); Nepal Census (2011).
Note: Groups such as Madheshi, Muslim, Dewan, Ghale, Marwari, and Dura have been omitted as their population in the UK is too small to show up in the figures.

rhetoric as well as emphasis on returning to Buddhism and/or old ethnic religions (Gellner 2001; International Crisis Group 2011); and (*iii*) the unique method of capturing multi-religiosity of the people adopted in the survey. The biggest group (42 per cent) of Nepalis in the UK was reported to be Hindu followed by Buddhists (29 per cent) and Kirat (10 per cent). The UK census data showed slightly different results mainly due to methodological differences: 53.9 per cent Hindu, 27.7 per cent Buddhist, 3.6 per cent Christian, 1.4 per cent no religion, and 12.5 per cent did not want to say. It showed less than 1 per cent following Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, or other religions. An interesting aspect of the survey is that it captured multiple religious identities, such as 'Hindu and Buddhist', which one in every six people follow (Gellner and Hausner 2013). National censuses,

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whether in Nepal or the UK, have so far failed to reflect this reality. Even though Hinduism and Buddhism are two minor religious groups in the UK (with 1.5 per cent and 0.4 per cent respectively) (Office for National Statistics 2012b), their presence in the Nepali population has contributed to noticeable increases in places where Nepalis are concentrated. The 2011 census highlighted the fact that "[B]uddhism was predominantly greater within the London areas with the exception of Rushmoor which saw the highest increase since 2001 of 2.9 percentage points to 3.3 per cent" (Office for National Statistics 2012b: 8). Rushmoor has become a new centre for Buddhism in the UK (BBC 2012).[15]

7. **Highly Employed Low-Profile Workforce**: The CNSUK's study revealed vital labour market indicators pertaining to the Nepali population in the UK. It showed that only 3.78 per cent of Nepalis were unemployed (1.37 per cent male and 7.6 per cent female).[16] 2.6 per cent of the sample or 188 were self-employed through small or medium enterprises. Almost half of the 271 Nepali-owned businesses were restaurants or related services (CNSUK 2011). Of the total employed, only 4 per cent were in 'higher professions', such as doctors and senior managers, and 7 per cent were in 'middle professions', such as nurses

[15] This is also because a Buddhist Community Centre UK (BCCUK), run by Nepali Buddhists, was set up and acquired a disused BT building for more than £400,000, entirely raised within the community. This was converted into a Tibetan Buddhist monastery and community centre. When the BCCUK invited the Dalai Lama to visit Aldershot (Rushmoor Borough) in June 2012 as part of the fundraising drive, more than 6,000 people turned out at Aldershot FC stadium to meet him (F. Gurung 2015: 170). He returned in June 2015 to open the new centre.

[16] Computation of the unemployment rate considers only those who are of economically active age and actively seeking a job. Hence this excludes over 1 in 5 Nepalis who are out of the job market and are not actively seeking employment due to full-time education. The 2011 Census showed 3.13 per cent males and 5.47 per cent females as unemployed. What is surprising and unexplainable in the Census report is that 25.6 per cent Nepalis were reported inactive. This could be due to errors made while filling out the forms.

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and chefs. This suggests that the majority (more than 85 per cent) were pursuing careers in lower classified jobs. For those with qualifications from Nepal, particularly other than medical, nursing, and engineering-related qualifications, there was a high mismatch between the level of education and occupation. For example, fewer than one in four with such degrees were employed in higher or middle professions, while half of them were in non-professional jobs; 43.8 per cent with science qualifications were in non-professional employment, while 12.6 per cent were in higher or middle-ranged professions; 43.7 per cent with teaching experience in Nepal were in non-professional work, while 19.1 per cent were in higher or middle-range professional work (Laksamba et al. 2012). It is to be expected that the second generation of Nepalis, even those with non-medical UK qualifications, will do better than the first generation, among whom many recent non-UK medical graduates are still finding it hard to qualify for UK jobs (Laksamba 2014). Overall, the findings indicated that, at least in the UK context, Nepalis emphasize and value work, and prefer not to rely on state benefits, wherever possible.[17]

8. **There is a Growing Number of Organizations Based on Particularist Membership Groups**: As the Nepali population is rising, so is the number of their associations. Most of these organizations are formed based on caste/ethnicity, affinity circles, regions of origin, and regions of present residence, or occupation. Caste/ethnicity-based organizations are large and strong in terms of mobilization, involvement of members, resources, ownership, unity (relative lack of conflict), and the density and intensity of their activities. Broad-based groups, mainly region-based, are present in good numbers, but are relatively weaker than the former.
9. **Slow and Constrained Integration and Social Mobility**: Nepalis are integrated among themselves through various informal

[17] Casey (2010: 5) makes the same observation. The newly arrived elderly Gurkhas are exceptions. Most have to rely on pension credit as their pension is either too low or non-existent.

and formal overlapping organizations based on various commonalities, such as: common regions of origin in Nepal, common region of residence in the UK, common occupations or professions. Being a non-resident Nepali is the most overarching basis for them to be integrated with each other and there exists a common organization called the Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA) (see Chapter 18 in this volume). However, Nepalis are more integrated within their own caste/ethnic sub-groups, than they are with other Nepalis, as is evident from specialized ethnic organizations. When it comes integrating within the wider society in Britain, it is positive but rather slow, particularly in terms of participation in formal political and civic forums. People are frequently members of many organizations, but in the vast majority of cases (93 per cent) they take membership only in Nepali or Nepal-focused groups.

10. **Problems with and Limits on Integration**: The six problematic areas raised by respondents to the survey related to education, security, health, (English) language, employment, and transportation. Large number of respondents (74 per cent) felt that the labour market system in the UK was not (completely) fair; and only half felt that there was equity in access to local services. Similarly, a large number (68 per cent) also felt that they did not fit well into the wider society in everyday situations. As Nepali settlement is very recent, it is unsurprising that participation in civic and political institutions and links with and access to government mechanisms are very limited. So far, there have been eleven elected and one co-opted local councillors from the Nepali community—of whom nine are currently serving (2016), and two have become deputy mayors, and recently, for the first time from the Nepali community, one has become Mayor (of a town council) of their respective councils—and a few people have started to participate in various mainstream civic forums. While another eight Nepalis have unsuccessfully tried their luck in the local council elections, so far only one Nepali has been a candidate (in 2017) for election as a Member of Parliament. These internal and external inbuilt constraints have slowed down the process of integration

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and social mobility. On the other hand, the survey showed that most Nepali households have an internet connection and many of them (with settled status) either have bought or were planning to buy a house in the near future.

11. **The Rising Number of British Nepalis**: The study also examined people's immigration status and citizenship. A vast majority (84 per cent) of the sampled population in the UK were still Nepali nationals while 1 per cent were neither Nepali nationals nor British. The up-to-date immigration information beginning from 1990 shows that by 2016, there were 31,938 former Nepali nationals who had become British citizens (see Figure 13.3). The rate of Nepalis becoming British citizens in recent years is high with a peak in 2013, after which it started to decline. Many are in line to become a citizen after fulfilling the five-year residence requirement. However, the hurdle of citizenship requirements, that is, the ever-increasing difficulty of tests in the English language and the examination on

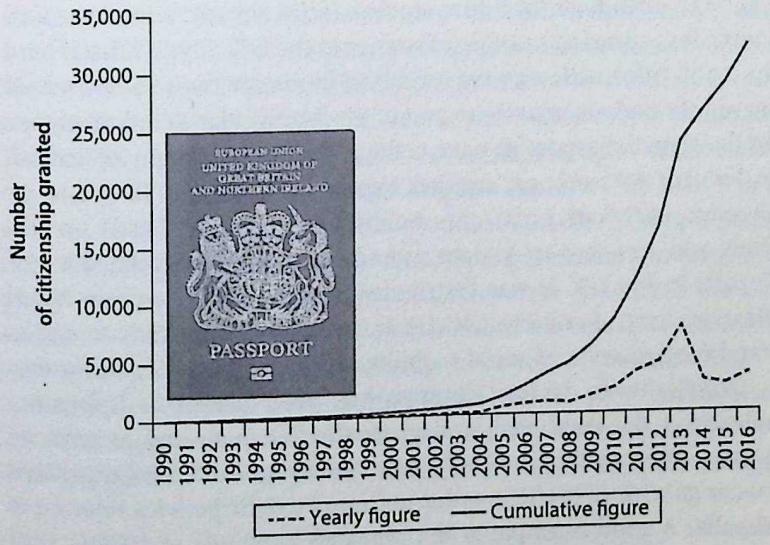

Figure 13.3 Former Nepali nationals as British citizens.

Source: Home Office (2017).

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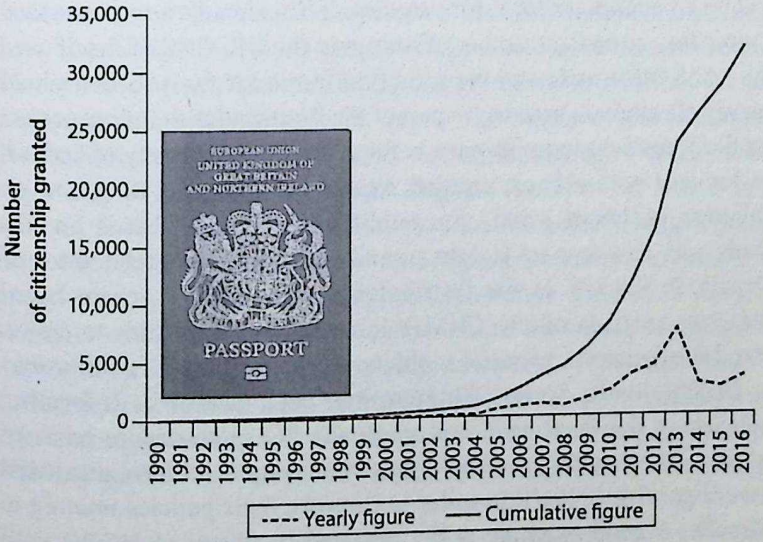

Figure 13.3 Former Nepali nationals as British citizens.

Source: Home Office (2017).

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'Life in the UK', means that many elderly ex-Gurkhas, who have been allowed to settle, will always remain Nepali nationals and thus disenfranchised.

DISSEMINATION AND ADVOCACY

There has been growing interest from various walks of life in the UK in the results of the CNSUK survey. Those enquiring for information regarding the Nepali population include MPs, local government agencies, and policymakers, the Headquarters of the Brigade of Gurkhas, researchers, students, Nepali community organizations and other diaspora organizations, and individuals. Many agencies, including the Nepal Embassy and UK government offices, have redirected enquiries to CNSUK regarding the Nepali population in the UK. In 2010 CNSUK organized sharing and feedback sessions, as well as programmes honouring volunteers and supporters without whom the research could not have been done. Several articles have been published in Nepali newspapers in the UK, and findings have been disseminated through radio and TV interviews. Apart from filling the knowledge gap on Nepalis in the UK, the 2008 survey has been and will be a benchmark for future studies. It has already served as a vital source for a growing number of studies in the UK. CNSUK itself used the 2008 information as the sampling frame for the 300-household survey of religious practice as part of the 'Vernacular Religion' project on the Nepali diaspora in partnership with the University of Oxford. In January 2012 a book, entitled *Nepalis in the United Kingdom: An Overview* (Adhikari 2012), was published in English based on this study and on other up-to-date secondary information related to the Nepalis in the UK. It was distributed both in the UK and in Nepal (Pearson 2013). Similarly, CNSUK initiated a further study to understand the dynamics of social mobility within the Nepali community.

Nepalis in the United Kingdom has been useful in informing policies at the local level and gradually it has started to have an impact. After reading the book, government agencies have organized meetings with CNSUK in order to improve their policies relating to Nepalis. A good example is the repeated meetings of HQBG with CNSUK to discuss how they could better understand and support the community of retired Gurkhas in the UK. Several local government

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authorities have acquired information related to their areas and made budgetary allocations as a result. Similarly, even before the 2011 census results were available, various local councils, including Rushmoor Borough Council, received additional budgetary allocations from central government to support newly settled Gurkhas who were not covered in the previous budget (Cockroft 2012).

Three linked examples of the way in which local government has received the CNSUK findings and publications may be given here. First, shortly after the arrival of Nepalis in the area had been represented in a somewhat negative way by Gerald Howarth, the MP for Aldershot, Alex Crawford, the Mayor of Rushmoor Borough Council, spontaneously promoted the book in his blog as follows, "The book ... which contains many references to Aldershot and Rushmoor ... is a timely contribution, which explores and analyses the pathways to integration, as it is available just as Rushmoor Borough Council prepares for the first meeting of its newly formed Task and Finish Group on Community Cohesion on 8 March."[18]

Second, Surrey Heath Borough Council organized an exhibition called 'Nepali Connections: An exhibition celebrating the local Nepalese population, Nepalese culture, Nepal, the Gurkha background and how Surrey Heath has become home' between 21 April and 30 June 2012 to celebrate the Nepali people's migration and settlement in the Surrey Heath Area. The exhibition featured diverse cultural, social, and economic aspects of life in Nepal. The Mayor of the Borough, Tim Dodds, ceremonially declared the exhibition open while holding a copy of *Nepalis in the United Kingdom* (2012) in his hands and referred to it while delivering his opening remarks. Taking a point from the book, he urged Nepalis and Nepal government to initiate a process that would allow them to access the same benefits in the UK as citizens of Commonwealth nations. About 60 copies of the book were sold by the museum shop during the course of the exhibition.

Third, in November 2013, Frimley Park Hospital, NHS Foundation Trust, brought health professionals, community workers, and policymakers together in a 'Nepalese Health Show' to promote knowledge

[18] Available at: http://mayorofrushmoor.wordpress.com/2012/02/29/nepalis-in-the-united-kingdom-an-overview/. Accessed on 28 June 2017.

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Figure 13.4 Mayor Tim Dodds and local Nepalis, at the opening of an exhibition on Nepali culture, Surrey Heath Museum.

Source: D.N. Gellner (20 April 2012).

about the health of Nepalis in the UK and to coordinate and improve future health policy and practice. CNSUK officials shared their findings and the organizers bought 115 copies of *Nepalis in the United Kingdom* to distribute to all the participants.

The CNSUK 2008 survey was not only an independent study in its own right, but also an exercise in action research that got the community involved in a census-like process. It probably contributed to a higher level of participation in the 2011 UK census than would otherwise have been the case. CNSUK remained in constant touch with the UK census agencies in terms of informing them of the interests and requirements of the Nepali community, pointing out gaps and lapses of statistics, sharing new findings, pointing out inconsistencies in the 2011 census process, and connecting the Nepali community with the census-implementing agencies across the length and breadth of the British Isles. Participating in the national census is not only legally

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mandatory, but also equally essential from the community's point of view. Local governments receive budgets based on the population count, and understanding types of people and their living conditions helps to tailor plans to the specific needs of the communities concerned. Previous experience shows that a large number of people from the ethnic minority categories in the UK usually remain uncounted in the census. About one in four of the Bangladeshi community that has been in the UK for many decades were omitted in the 2001 census and their numbers had to be statistically adjusted (Adhikari 2012: 157). Nepalis, being new migrants and lacking knowledge and not understanding the importance of the census, would very likely have been left out in even greater numbers had there not been a huge exercise to make people aware of the importance of the census by involving them in the community-led study and subsequent educational campaigns.[19] Even after the large coordinated campaign and linkage with the ONS, we believe that a substantial chunk of the Nepali population was still missing in the 2011 UK census.

The post-census enquiry by CNSUK showed that many people did not participate in the census either because they did not receive a form, or because they did not know about it, or because the household head did not bother about it, or was afraid to include lodgers. Yet, over all, the UK census recorded a good number of Nepalis and the results show that in England and Wales there were 60,202 Nepalis in March 2011. As stated, this is still an undercount, and the true figure could be above 80,000 (Adhikari 2013b).

LESSONS

Several lessons can be learnt from this study. We highlight here some of the more important ones.

UK Immigration Data Were Far from Capturing Reality

Our analysis shows that some immigration data are not accurate in the UK. At least in the case of the Nepali population in the UK, they

[19] Upon completion of the 2011 UK census, the ONS wrote to CNSUK to acknowledge the contribution made by CNSUK.

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were grossly under-represented and were proved wrong by the official census itself.[20] On the other hand, the lack of proper statistics and understanding about Nepalis paves the way for continued wild guesses about their size and dynamics. The habit of exaggerating population size may be a general human tendency, but it is strikingly so among some Nepali communities in the UK, and few other countries, such as Australia and the USA (Adhikari 2013a). Systematic study of the size and dynamics of a population helps in understanding the strength, problems, and needs of that population. In order to advocate for support in integration or for other rights, one has to be able to make a well-researched and informed case. The study of Nepalis in 2008 tried to do exactly this.

Community Social Capital is an Important Element and has a Role to Play in Successful Community Development

Organizing a 'census' is a big project requiring very considerable resources. For example, the UK population census cost huge amounts (about £500 million in 2011). Despite the resources expended, about 3 million people failed to fill in the forms in 2001 (*The Telegraph* 2011). In 2011, the ONS adopted a strategy of massively mobilizing the voluntary sector in order to increase community participation. This is the same strategy that our Nepali 'census' relied on in 2008 but more intensively. The reliance on the community not only meant getting endorsements and support in making community members aware, but also increasing local ownership of the project and raising much required resources. Due to the culturally embedded institutions of community/familial cooperation, Nepalis stay connected with each other, formally and informally, with or without modern (electronic) social networking. The study proved that community members can

[20] After publishing the 2011 census results, the ONS discovered a mistake, that for a decade they had undercounted EU migrants by over half a million. The previous estimation based on the birth, death, and other official immigration figures proved wrong (Dawer 2013). As discussed above, there was a huge discrepancy between the ONS 2001 estimation of Nepalis in England and Wales and the results of the 2011 census (Adhikari 2012).

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take multiple roles such as: respondents, enumerators, funders, and owners of the project. Despite being relatively weakly integrated into the wider society, due to their recent arrival in the UK, their good connectivity among themselves was still a powerful resource or 'weapon of the weak'. Thus, we may say that the 2008 survey was a 'census' of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Having said that, it would be naive to think that studies like this receive support from everyone in the community. After initial doubts and suspicions were clarified, many joined in and assisted in the process wholeheartedly. However, a few people continued to be opposed and to speak against it, either because of personal differences, or because they suspected a political agenda, or because they remained unconvinced that knowledge would bring power, or maybe because they were not convinced that any benefits would come to them even if Nepalis were recognized as a separate category. In this context, the level of commitments and priorities also varied, even from one set of NRNAUK officials to another. Normally people at NRNA, particularly in the UK, show little interest in research, as it is regarded as academic work beyond their field of concern, which properly belongs in universities and research organizations. However, exceptionally, the support from the NRNAUK for the 2008 survey was very high. Furthermore, the apathy shown by a small number of individuals also stemmed from the perception that the survey could be harmful as it might expose Nepalis to, and make them a target of, right-wing nationalist groups. Although, this argument may appear genuine, especially in post-Brexit Britain, it is not well founded in the UK case for four reasons. First, ethnic figures cannot be concealed as national censuses clearly reveal them. Second, personal data from both the CNSUK survey of 2008 and the national censuses are not disclosed (for 100 years). Third, Nepalis have made great contributions to Britain, most obviously as Gurkha soldiers, and, so far, have not done anything negative so as to become a target of race-hate groups (Parker 1999). Finally, far-right groups will choose their targets on the basis of general perceptions; the existence or otherwise of demographic studies is irrelevant to them.

The successful implementation of the survey project bore witness to the coordinating power and legitimacy of the broad-based organization, NRNAUK (see further, Chapter 18 below), and also to the

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neutrality and objectivity of the CNSUK as a research organization. It showed also that, when activities of common interest are organized, people are willing to put aside narrow differences and to work hard to support them.

Clarity about Who is Included in 'Nepalis in the UK'

One aspect requiring clarity in the study was the definition of who counts as Nepali. 'Nepalis in the UK' generally includes British Nepalis—former Nepali nationals who have become British citizens—as well as other Nepalis who reside in the UK but are not British. The second category of people includes both the settled and temporary residents, but not visitors. There are other groups included in Nepalis in the UK whose immediate former or present nationality is not Nepali, nor are they British citizens, but they are still people of Nepali origin. These include people who come from Hong Kong, the European Economic Area, or other countries, and who, before becoming nationals of those countries, were either Nepali nationals themselves or had parents who were. This excludes Indian, Bhutanese, and Burmese Nepalis as their immediate country of origin is not Nepal even though they are people of Nepali origin.

Despite this definition, people of Nepali origin from Bhutan, India, or Burma are likely to have built a close bond with people from Nepal living in their locality and to participate in cultural activities, while, by contrast, some people from Nepal might not feel or want to be close to each other at all (see Chapter 17 below). Ethnic politics, polarization, and resultant chasms in Nepal have had an influence on inter-ethnic relations in the UK. There is no figure to determine the number of Indian, Bhutanese, and Burmese Nepalis in the UK. While in a broader cultural sense these would all be regarded as Nepalis in the UK, for the purposes of the UK census only those whose recent or previous nationality is Nepali are included.

Religious Practices of Nepalis Can be Mapped in an Innovative Way

One of the important aspects of the CNSUK's survey was to innovate and to test the mapping of religion among Nepalis in the UK. Nepalis

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are often regarded as practising syncretism and as being a religiously tolerant people. Yet neither Nepal's census nor the UK census allows people to identify themselves as multi-religious. No wonder their results are contestable. This survey allowed people to choose a combination of religions; many people took this opportunity.[21] This method was further applied in the Vernacular Religion survey of 2010 conducted by CNSUK and Oxford University and was further improved. In essence, this suggests that censuses, at least in Nepal and other South Asian countries, may benefit from following our methods in their census projects.

ACTION RESEARCH AND OWNERSHIP

In conclusion, this research shows how, at relatively small cost, new findings that are of real relevance to people can be generated, if there is sufficient will, energy, and motivation behind them. In fact, participatory action research of this kind does not only create knowledge; it is, at the same time, empowering. Knowledge generation goes hand in hand with community development and increased civic engagement, which simultaneously supports integration within the wider society. Even though very few systematic research projects like this have been attempted, we have shown that doing research this way is both possible and useful. Rapid and participatory assessment tools (Chambers 1983) may have been designed for community development in less developed countries, but there is no reason why they cannot be adapted and combined with quantitative methods for use in the context of the developed world.

[21] See Hausner and Gellner (2012); Gellner and Hausner (2013); Gellner, Hausner, and Shrestha (2014); Pariyar, Shrestha, and Gellner (2014) for some preliminary results of this mapping.

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14

INVENTION AND TRADITION

LIMBU ADAPTATIONS OF RELIGION IN THE DIASPORA

Bal Gopal Shrestha and *David N. Gellner*

> Listen and learn yea children of Kirat people. I am he, who is the Principal spirit of God Yumasam, the Omnipresent Ningwaphuma, who is imparting sacred instructions.
> (Chemjong 1966 [1948]: 108–9)

> I am an indomitable and powerful spirit. I will bestow prosperity and happiness on you and gift the spirit of knowledge, wisdom, leadership and bless you with longevity. However do not forsake and forget me. Regard me as your parent and abide by my religious doctrines. You will enjoy happiness and love and be blessed. You shall not repent, your sons and descendants shall be great among all people.
> (Chemjong 1966 [1948]: 113)

THIS CHAPTER DISCUSSES THE INVENTION and adaptation of religious traditions among Limbu Nepalis in the UK.[1] It is based on field research,

[1] We thank Chandra Laksamba and Martin Gaenszle for comments and suggestions. We also thank Dil Bikram Angdembe in Kathmandu for his support during the fieldwork in Nepal (2011 and 2012), and for his comments on

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in-depth interviews with individuals, observations of various religious activities both in the UK and in Nepal, and relevant secondary sources. We hope to demonstrate how keen people are to give continuity to their religious beliefs and practices in the new situation in the diaspora, but also how this new situation forces certain adaptations and creative inventions upon them.

We were both a part of the Vernacular Religion project investigating religion among the Nepali diaspora population in the UK from 2009 to 2012 as mentioned in the preface (above, p. xv). During this period all members of the team, and Shrestha in particular, met many Nepali individuals and families with diverse cultural and religious practices from different ethnic, lingual, social, and political backgrounds. As part of this fieldwork, and in addition to conducting numerous interviews, Shrestha attended feasts, festivals, and barbecue parties, social and political gatherings, annual meetings, and many public and private rituals. From whatever background they come, the vast majority of Nepalis appear keen to give continuity to their religious, ritual, lingual, and cultural practices. They have established more than 400 organizations in the UK: the focus of these organizations ranges from socio-religious, cultural, and ethnic to sports and entertainment, and from regional community-building to supporting political parties in Nepal (Adhikari 2012; Gellner, Hausner, and Shrestha 2014).

Nepalis in the UK practise their religion at different levels. On the one hand, they carry out religious and ritual activities as individuals and families in their homes, apartments, and rented rooms. On the other hand, they also enact their religious practices at public meetings organized by various community associations. In terms of religious affiliations, the Vernacular Religion sample of 300 households (2010), discussed in Chapter 13 above, indicated that the Hindus are the highest in number with 42 per cent, followed by Buddhists 29 per cent, Kirat 10 per cent, Hindu and Buddhist 9 per cent, Kirat and Hindu 5 per cent, Kirat and Buddhist 2 per cent, and Christian 2 per cent.

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an earlier draft. We are grateful to officials of the Kirat Yakthung Chumlung as well as to many Sabdi gurus, both in the UK and in Nepal, especially Ramkumar Thebe, for gracious welcomes to their events and generous cooperation. We alone are responsible for any errors that remain.

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Many Nepali groups have either established already or are trying to establish temples, monasteries, or cultural houses where they can gather and practise regularly. For instance, the Tamu or Gurungs, the largest group among Nepali settlers in the UK, bought a former church hall in Mytchett, Surrey, for their Tamu Dhee Community Centre in Mytchett, Surrey; it is in high demand for community events (not only by Gurungs) as well as for ceremonies such as weddings and funerals.[2] In 2011–12 the Buddhist Community Centre, UK (BCCUK) successfully raised nearly £400,000 to purchase a building in Aldershot, Hampshire, in order to convert it into a Buddhist monastery-temple and community centre, as mentioned above (p. 320, n. 15). Similarly, a group of Nepalis in southeast London associated with the Nepalese Hindu Temple and Cultural Committee bought property in 2011, which they have turned into a Pashupati temple, a replica of Pashupatinath in Kathmandu.

Nepali Hindus also visit various Hindu temples established by Indians in the UK. One of them, the Ram Mandir in Woolwich, east London, primarily supported by Gujaratis, has a Nepali Brahmin, Nilhari Ghimire, as its main priest. Another Hindu temple, the Ram Mandir that some Indians initiated in Southall, west London, has a number of Nepalis on its steering committee and Mahanta Shrestha, a Nepali businessman, is a trustee. Mr Shrestha brought an attractive stone image of Pashupatinath from Nepal and had it installed in this temple in June 2003. Many Nepalis visit this temple during Hindu festivals. This temple also facilitates many religious functions, spiritual gatherings, and talk programmes for the Nepali Hindu community. The World Hindu Federation UK Chapter, set up by Nepalis in 2003, has plans to construct its own Hindu temple. Pandit Nilhari Ghimire and many other Nepali Bahun priests are kept busy carrying out rituals requested by Nepalis across the UK. Similarly, many other Nepalese organizations and ethnic groups, including the Kirat

[2] Tamu Dhee UK estimates the Gurung population in the UK at 40,000 (see www.tamudheeuk.com/page.php?pid=1; accessed on 15 August 2014). The CNSUK survey confirms Gurungs as the largest Nepali population in the UK and gives a figure of 24 percent of the total 72,173 population that it found in 2008, that is, 17,321 people (Adhikari et al. 2012: 44).

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Yakthung Chumlung UK (KYC-UK), have elaborate plans to establish cultural and/or religious centres in the UK. In short, Nepalis in the UK devote an impressive amount of time and money to the task of preserving and re-establishing their religions, rituals, and cultures.[3]

THE LIMBUS IN NEPAL AND IN THE UK

The Limbus (Yakthungs or Yakthumbas, as they call themselves in their own language) are considered to be the descendants of the Kirats, who, according to various Nepalese chronicles and myths, ruled Nepal before the Licchavi dynasty (second to ninth centuries CE).[4] The 2011 population census of Nepal put the number of Limbus at 387,300, most of them in the eastern hills of Nepal (CBS 2012: 154).

[3] The preservation of minority languages is often included as a key aim of the organizations mentioned here, and some of them organize language classes, but the passing on of language is by no means as simple as the performance of rituals, songs, or dances. Whereas the majority of the older generation, having been brought up in rural areas in Nepal, are fluent both in Limbu/Yakthungpan and in Nepali, most of the younger generation in the UK know hardly any Limbu (or other Kirat language) but are fluent in Nepali and English. The majority of Nepali youth in the UK have only minimal levels of literacy in Nepali.

[4] We use 'Kirat' since most informants preferred this form. There are many variants: 'Kirata', 'Kirant', 'Kirati', or 'Kiranti' (see Gaenszle 2000, 2002b). Schlemmer (2003/2004) discusses Kirat history. Iman Singh Chemjong was the first person to provide an elaborate history of the Kirat to the scholarly world in 1948 (third revised edition 1966, fourth edition by Kirat Yakthung Chumlung, Lalitpur, 2003a). See Chemjong (2003a) for Kirat history in Nepali. In his study of the Kulung Rai, Allen (2012, originally a 1976 Oxford DPhil) discusses Kirati myths shared by various Rai groups and Limbus. See Singh (1990, 2008) for comprehensive studies of the history of the Kirats in ancient India. Fitzpatrick (2011) is a recent ethnography of a Limbu village thought to be one of the most attached to Limbu tradition. He found a correlation between maintaining the Limbu language and frequent performance of rituals (Fitzpatrick 2011: 126). On Kirat religion, see Chemjong (1966 [1948], 2003b), the contributions on east Nepal in Hitchcock and Jones (1976), Gaenszle (2010, 2012, 2013, 2016), Sagant (1996), Subba (1995), and von Stockhausen and Wettstein (2013).

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They are mainly to be found in the districts of Dhankuta, Ilam, Jhapa, Morang, Panchthar, Sankhuwasabha, Sunsari, Taplejung, and Tehrathum. There are also traditional areas of Limbu settlement over the border in Sikkim and Darjeeling in India. In India their number is estimated to be around 120,000 in West Bengal and 60,000 in Sikkim.[5] Small numbers are found in at least 18 other states of India.

The part of Nepal where the Limbus are found is also known as Pallo ('further') Kirat. Limbu activists aspire to turn this area into the State of Limbuwan or land of Limbus in federal Nepal. The territory of Limbuwan, if all Limbu settlements are included, spans from the Arun River in Nepal to the former kingdom of Sikkim in the east. Many Limbus have also settled in the Kathmandu Valley. In the recent past a large number of Limbus have migrated to various European countries, America, and Hong Kong, as well as to Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore on a more temporary basis. Most recently, many Limbus have migrated to the UK because the British government granted them residency rights as ex-Gurkhas.[6] Precise figures for the number of Limbus in the UK are not available, but the 2008 CNS survey lists them as one of the five largest Nepali groups, with between 13 and 18 per cent of the UK Nepali population, that is, between 9,382 and 12,991 people (see Figure 13.2 above); whereas in Nepal they are just 1.6 per cent of the overall population (Adhikari et al. 2012: 44; Table 1.1, pp. 7–8 above). The largest place of settlement of Limbus is Ashford in Kent; the second-largest concentration of Limbus, though much smaller, is to be found in Oxford.

In 1989 the Kirat Yakthung Chumlung (KYC) was founded in Nepal with the aim of uplifting the Limbus and campaigning for equal rights from the government. According to Bal Krishna Mabuhang, a Limbu scholar and a former general secretary of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), the Limbus have 16 different organizations in Nepal, but the Kirat Yakthung

5 Sikkim figures are from a Sikkim government survey of 2005–06, courtesy of Tanka Subba (see Table 1.1, pp. 7–8 above).

6 See Caplan (1995) and Sagant (1996: Chapter 9) on the tradition of serving as Gurkhas among the Limbus, and Laksamba (2012) on Gurkha settlement in the UK.

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Chumlung is generally accepted as the national organization of all Limbus. Branches have been opened in various districts of Nepal and beyond, for example in Canada, Hong Kong, Korea, Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, the UK, and the USA. In the UK the Kirat Yakthung Chumlung KYC-UK was founded in 2003. In 2011 it had branches in eleven UK cities and regions, which had expanded to 20 by 2016.[7] The KYC-UK gives its aims as follows:

1. To undertake various activities for the upliftment of the Limbus, their language including Kirat-Sirijonga script, literature, religion and culture.
2. To conduct research on subjects related to Limbus and promote awareness among them.
3. To assist and organise various activities of social and welfare related problems and development of Limbus for those living in the UK.
4. To conduct effective charity programmes to benefit and foster friendship with local communities in the UK.
5. To develop and promote friendly relationship with other ethnic groups and communities, and enhance work for the consolidation of democracy, national unity and preservation of the culture of the community.
6. To conduct awareness programmes against drug abuse.
7. To plan and carry out appropriate programmes in order to wipe out superstition and ignorance of people about health problems both in the UK and Nepal.
8. To work for human rights, indigenous people's rights and women and children's right.
9. To foster the Yakthung Chumlung UK's relationship with other Yakthung Chumlung societies throughout the world.[8]

[7] According to its website, www.chumlunguk.org (accessed on 15 June 2016), which also listed over 1,600 individual members.

[8] These aims are taken from the KYC-UK website. Punctuation and spelling are as in the original, available at: www.chumlunguk.org/about-us/aim. Accessed on 12 May 2016. The eleven objectives of the KYC are given in its constitution, originally written in 1990 and subsequently amended five times (KYC 2006: 3).

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These aims are adapted from the objectives of the central KYC in Nepal. This makes it clear that the members of the KYC-UK are in fact following the lead and the principles of the KYC in Nepal. At the same time they carry out some activities specific to the UK, such as Limbu language classes for children in Ashford, Kent.

LIMBU RELIGION

Most Limbus in Nepal consider themselves the followers of Kirat religion. The 2011 Nepalese census puts the total number of people following Kirat religion at 807,169 or 3.1 per cent of the total population of Nepal (CBS 2012: 4). This number includes Limbus, but also Rais, Yakkhas, Sunuwars, and Hayus, as well as some smaller groups living in the Tarai.

When we compare the total number of followers of Kirat religion in 2011 with the 2001 census, we see that the number of its adherents declined by 3 per cent or 10,937. Dahal suggests that this is because of the appearance of the new category of 'nature worshipper', so that many who had previously been classified as following Kirati Dharma re-assigned themselves in 2011 (2014: 21). The substantial fall in the number of Rais following the Kirat religion (a drop off of 45,004 between 2011 and 2001) shown in Table 14.1 would be for the same reason. Furthermore, the 2011 Census reveals a decline of the total Rai population by 15,153 compared to 2001; this is due to the fact that some

Table 14.1 Major ethnic groups following Kirat religion (2001 and 2011 census)

Ethnic groups	Total population, 2001 census	Kirat religion number & percentage 2001 census	Total population 2011	Kirat religion number & percentage 2011 census
1. Rai	635,157	450,283 (70.9)	620,004	405,279 (65.4)
2. Limbu	359,379	310,108 (86.3)	387,300	315,991 (81.6)
3. Sunuwar	92,254	16,533 (17.4)	55,712	00 (0.0)
4. Yakha	17,003	13,846 (81.4)	24,336	19,750 (81.2)
Total	1,106,793	790,790	1,087,352	741,020

Sources: CBS (2001: 107), Dahal (2014: 22).

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Rai sub-groups began to be recognized as separate ethnic categories. In addition, it is very striking to find not a single Sunuwar reported as following Kirat religion in 2011; this may be due to some problems in the collection of the data. In 2011, 51,419 Sunuwars were recorded as Hindu (92.3 per cent) and 4,032 as Christians (7.2 per cent) (Dahal 2014: 22).

Traditionally the Limbus, and indeed all Kirats, are nature worshippers. They worship rivers, rocks, trees, air, the sky, and the earth, but not Hindu gods and goddesses. However, the influence of Hindu religious traditions is considerable.[9] There are also some influences from Tibetan Buddhism in their religious practices. Some Limbus follow Hindu and Kirat religious traditions simultaneously while a few follow Kirat and Buddhism together. Many of them claim to follow a mixture of Hindu, Buddhist, and Kirat religions,[10] but of course such multiple religious allegiance is not envisaged within Nepal's national censuses. Thus, the 2011 census of Nepal, reports that the Limbus follow various religions as shown in Table 14.2.

Although the number of Rais claiming 'Kirat religion' has fallen, the same has not happened among Limbus, for whom, as Table 14.2 shows, it is overwhelmingly the most popular choice. Within the Limbus we encounter two distinct groups, both of which tend to return the same label of 'Kirat religion' in the census: one follows traditional Limbu beliefs and practices; the other follows Satyahangma, a new religion invented in the 1930s by a Limbu teacher, Mahaguru Phalgunanda or Falgunanda.[11]

9 Hinduization of Nepal's ethnic populations, even those in the far east of the country, began a long time back. Allen (2008 [1997]) analyses the Hinduization of the Thulung Rai, a Kirat subgroup, on the basis of fieldwork in the 1960s. See Subba (1995) for Limbu culture and religion.

10 Gellner and Hausner (2013: 86–7) quote from Dr Chandra Laksamba, ex-Gurkha and Limbu, as follows: "I do believe and practise in three religions: Hindu ... I [also] go to Swayambhu, and the birthplace of Lord Buddha, that is the Buddhist religion. And I do practise my Kirat religion ... Especially when we die, death ritual is based on Kirat religion. We don't use Hindu priests or Buddhist lamas." This kind of multiple practice, whether avowed or not, is in fact very common among Limbus.

11 See Gaenszle (2013, 2016) for the life history of Phalgunanda and the spread of his religious teachings among the various Kirat groups.

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Table 14.2 Limbu religious affiliation

Religion	Number 2001	Number 2011
Kirat	310,108	315,991
Hindu	40,675	55,525
Buddhist	2,948	3,077
Christian	4,228	11,356
Prakriti (Nature)	–	163
Jain	47	–
Sikh	73	–
Bahai	157	–
Unidentified	1,133	1,188
Total	359,379	387,300

Source: CBS (2001: 133, 2014: 44).

There is considerable variation in the terminology used to describe traditional Limbu ritual specialists. All may be considered shamans, all recite (at least some of) the Mundhum, all preside over the sacrifice of animals, and all of them offer (among other things) alcohol. The most common term is Phedangma, which is also sometimes used as a catch-all for all Limbu priests.[12] Other common types of priest are the Yeba (male) or Yema (female), and the Samba. The Yeba/Yema is considered more powerful than an ordinary Phedangma, because they are capable of reciting the Mundhum for three days and nights; and the Samba has a special responsibility for dealing with the souls of those who have died an unnatural death.

The Mundhum is considered the main source of the Limbus' religion and culture.[13] Yuma or Yumasam ('sam' means spirit) is a

[12] Limbus frequently say 'Phedangba' rather than 'Phedangma', but the latter is the form that has gained acceptance in written sources on the Limbus.

[13] Recently Tejman Angdembe, a Limbu scholar, has examined the ritual language of the Mundhum providing a succinct discussion of its value and meaning (Angdembe 2011). Under different names, the Mundhum is found everywhere among Kirat people. Among the Mewahang Rai, it is known as *Muddhum*, among Yakha Rai as *Mintum*, among the Kulung

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powerful female tutelary spirit, who is sometimes identified with the omnipresent god, Tagera Ningwa Phuma (Chemjong 1966 [1948]: 105). Theba or Thebasam (literally 'grandfather spirit') is a deified king, Ku-wang-ti, who is a warrior spirit, associated with war and weapons (Chemjong 1966 [1948]: 79–82). Limbus believe that Yuma protects them all, and, when something goes wrong, one should remember Yuma. Some Limbus, particularly in Sikkim, call their tradition Yuma dharma or Theba dharma. The Limbus, and Kirats more generally, have no tradition of worshipping idols or constructing temples. Everything is done orally.

By contrast, the followers of Phalgunanda reject the use of shamans, alcohol, and animal sacrifice (all of which are essential for those following the ancestral Limbu traditions). They have their own rituals based on printed liturgies written in Limbu (Srijanga) script. A rough estimation is that about 20 to 30 per cent of Limbus follow Satyahangma, while the rest continue to follow traditional Limbu religious practices. However, any attempt at greater precision runs up against the fact that many Limbus attend Satyahangma events while continuing traditional practices in other contexts. Satyahangma followers also refer to their holy texts as 'mundhum'. Satyahangma followers identify with Kiratesvar Mahadev, that is, Shiva, and are willing to make correspondences between Limbu spirits and Hindu gods. Traditionalist authors, such as Angdembe (2012: 153–7), are hostile to this tendency.

Within the Satyahangma followers there are at least two main groups: those who accept the leadership of Guru Atmananda, whose main centre is in Larumba, Ilam district, and those who do not. The Atmananda followers established the temple in Sankhadevi, Lubhu, which is described below. The others, who follow Phalgunanda only, have their main temple at the new Kiratesvar temple in Pashupati.[14]

Many observers consider Limbus to be animists (Sagant 1996: 90). Traditionally the Limbus were indeed non-theists and were the

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as *Ridum*, and among the Chamling simply as *Dum* (Gaenszle 2008b: 5). See also Gaenszle (2012) for more on Rai myth and ritual. See also Subba (1998) for more on the philosophy and teachings of Yuma Samyo (Yumaism).

[14] We thank Martin Gaenszle for this information; see also Gaenszle (2016: 347).

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followers of multiple gods, but in more recent times some have come to see their religion in a theistic way. Tagera Ningwa Phuma is conceived of as an omnipresent god. Traditionally, they did not perform long or complicated rituals and, as noted, did not have any tradition of idol worship. According to Bairagi Kainla (1999, 2008), offerings are placed on leaves and disposed of at the end of the puja. They offer *tongba*, a home-brewed alcoholic drink, to their gods. They do not use ghee or milk for any puja. They do burn a common leaf called *tite pati*. The use of incense, wick lamps, and water flasks (*kalasa*) are recent additions to Limbu religious practice.

Lately, with the increased influence of Satyahangma, many Limbu have begun to feel it necessary to bring changes to some of their traditions. They have begun to see the killing of animals and drinking of alcohol as 'uncivilized'. In east Nepal animal sacrifice among the Kirats is still a living tradition. Even after moving to Kathmandu or elsewhere, most continue the tradition. The Kathmandu Valley itself has many Tantric deities and the indigenous Newars frequently sacrifice animals to their deities. However, in terms of following religious tradition, shifting from the ancestral homeland entails some practical problems. Even today, when someone dies, Limbus living in Kathmandu are obliged to bring a Phedangma priest from Dharan, Panchthar, or Taplejung, as none live in Kathmandu. The Limbu younger generation, for its part, is less and less attached to Limbu traditions. At the same time, with the increase in the number of educated people in the community, discourses of human rights and animal rights are more often heard, which means that opposition to blood sacrifice is on the rise.[15]

As far as the modern period is concerned, divisions over religion among the Limbus began with the introduction of the Satyahangma sect. Its founder, Mahaguru Phalgunanda, was born Nardhoj Lingden; he acquired the nickname Phalamsingh when young. He joined the British Gurkha Army and reached the rank of sergeant (*hawaldar*), but, not long after being sent to Burma, he resigned, came back to Nepal, devoted himself to religious activities, and

[15] For this issue among other groups in Nepal, see Michaels (2016) and Adhikari and Gellner (2016a).

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initiated the Satyahangma movement. The word *satya* (truth) comes from Sanskrit while *hang/hangma* is Limbu for 'king' and 'queen'. Mahaguru Phalgunanda did not write his teachings down; they were collected by his followers after his death. Many consider that the Satyahangma sect was influenced by the Josmani sect of the Hindu religion, which had adherents in east Nepal in the nineteenth century, but this is not a heritage that the Satyahangma followers themselves are keen to claim. A Satyahangma intellectual, Chandra Kumar Sherma-Limbu, has elaborated Phalgunanda's teachings and philosophy in his numerous publications (Sherma-Limbu 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). Shyam Bahadur Lingden, who is best known as Guru Atmananda, is the leader of a slightly different sect within Satyahangma. Many regard him as the successor of Phalgunanda (Gaenszle 2013: 67, 2016). The government of Nepal decided to add Phalgunanda to its list of national heroes (*rastriya vibhuti*) in December 2009.

Satyahangma introduced a kind of monotheist religion into Limbu society. Phalgunanda's followers began to discard Limbu deities and the associated practices of animal sacrifice and use of alcohol. All Limbus consider the Mundhum as the main source of their religion. The Mundhum, as we have seen, is in origin an oral tradition. Against this, the Satyahangma followers have introduced a complex written religious liturgy, but they still call their religion 'Kirat', still consider Tagera Ningwa Phuma as the supreme god, and still regard the Mundhum as the fundamental scripture that guides them. However, they interpret Mundhum in their own way, which differs from other Limbus. The movement for education in the mother tongue also took off at the same time as the Satyahangma movement. The Satyahangma sect encouraged people to discard meat and alcohol during life-cycle and death-related rituals, as well as during feasts and festivals. Satyahangma also encouraged people to reduce the extravagance and expense incurred in life-cycle and death rituals. In all these ways, Satyahangma can be seen as a reformist and nativist movement that emphasizes Limbu identity and Limbu pride (and correspondingly downplays clan identities and local differences).

In Nepal, the followers of Satyahangma and the followers of the traditional Limbu religious people have, from time to time, had acrimonious relations. Fierce debates have taken place for and against

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the Satyahangma sect. Limbu scholars, such as Tejman Angdembe (2012), have written articles attacking Satyahangma. The main criticism is for their performance of fire sacrifice (*homa*), which is seen as a borrowing from Hinduism. The critics emphasize that there is no trace of fire sacrifice in traditional Limbu religion and so they accuse the Satyahangma sect of spreading Hindu religious beliefs and rituals among Kirat people (Angdembe 2012: 35). The Satyahangma principle of preaching against animal sacrifice is appreciated, but they are accused of hypocrisy, that is, of preaching against sacrifice and yet continuing to eat meat and drink alcohol in private.

In recent years many Limbus have converted to Christianity. Despite being enthusiastic and committed to their new faith, Christians, unlike other religious sects, are not highly respected in Limbu society. In his study of three Kirat communities in Nepal, Tanka Subba comments, "The Kiratas seem to have suffered from a crisis of religious identity for fairly long period of time. This crisis seems to be due not only because of nomenclative indeterminacy but also to the scorn and humiliation by the Tagadharis [high-caste Hindus], who consider themselves superior to the Kiratas" (Subba 1999: 96).

THE KIRAT MANGHIM TEMPLE IN SANO HATTIBAN, KATHMANDU

In Kathmandu there is a Kirat temple for the Limbus in Sano Hattiban, south of Patan, which has become an important focus for Limbus and other Kirat people. The site in fact was allotted for religious observances to Rai and Limbu soldiers in 1848 following their recruitment into the Nepalese army for the first time, in the new Bhairavnath regiment (Yakthumba 2009: 11; Gaenszle 2016: 344). Subsequently, the government attempted to reclaim the land, but the Limbus went to court and won. Since 2001 the land has come legally under the ownership of the Limbus (Yakthumba 2009: 11). The sanctuary covers an area of 2.34 hectares and has become a pilgrimage site (*tirtha sthal*) for all Kirats. It is crowded on Saturdays and Tuesdays. On such days visitors sometimes exceed 200; on other days there are usually 50 or fewer visitors.

In the Limbu language the site is called a Manghim. Tekbahadur Limbu, the priest at the temple, which Shrestha visited in September

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2011, explained that 'Mang' means god and 'Him' house.[16] The Limbus share the temple with Rais, Yakkhas, and Sunuwars. Despite having a common place to worship, Limbus, Rais, Yakkhas, and Sunuwars have different ways of worshipping. Each community believes in different deities, but they share a common religious and cultural identity as Kirats. Representatives of the four groups launched a collective effort to have their religion recognized as 'Kirat' as a way of resisting what they saw as longstanding Hindu domination. They succeeded in having the category Kirat religion accepted for the 1991 national census. That census recorded a total of 318,389 followers of Kirat religion in Nepal (CBS 2001: 104), a figure which would more than double ten years later in 2001 (see Table 14.1 above, p. 338). According to academician Bairagi Kainla (Til Bikram Nemwang), in the past there had been no overarching concept of Kirat dharma and in that sense the label 'Kirati Dharma' introduced in 1991 was an innovation.

At the bottom of the hill in Sano Hattiban a signboard announces 'Kirat Manghim Mandir'. Stone steps lead up towards the temple. Half way up a white marble slab records the names of the donors. An inscription commemorates the inauguration of the steps by Bairagi Kainla on the 15th day of the Nepali month of Jeth, 2066 of the Vikram era, coinciding with Nepal's Republic Day of 2009. On the left of the temple entrance another large marble plate lists 40 donors who paid for the renovation of the courtyard.

The one-storey temple is a white-painted rectangular structure; in each direction there is an entrance gate. Each direction is dedicated to a different Kirat group: Limbu, Rai, Yakkha, and Sunuwar. Each group has a separate shrine with a different shape. The Limbus have a white rectangular pyramid structure as their shrine, a shape which, in its present form, seems to have been invented by the followers of Satyahangma (the Josmani cult used similar forms: M. Gaenszle, pers. comm.). A stone tripod (*tin chulho*) represents the Kirat Rai Yayokkha. A trident (*trisul*) and bells are placed as the symbol for the

[16] In Chemjong's *Kirat-Nepali-English–Dictionary* we find the word *manghimjong* translated as 'pinnacle' (Chemjong 1961: 206), but there is no entry for *manghing* or *manghim*, which may perhaps be taken as evidence that it is a neologism created to describe a new reality.

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Figure 14.1 The Kirat Manghim Temple in Sano Hattiban, Nepal.

Source: B.G. Shrestha (12 September 2011).

Kirat Sunuwar Welfare Trust, and the Kirat Yakkha Chumma have a cage-like structure (see Gaenszle 2016: 344–6). In the centre, a wooden pole has been erected. Some red and white coloured cotton pieces are offered over the pole together with bells and tridents.

Tekbahadur Limbu is the resident Phedangma. He takes care of the temple and performs prayers daily. The Kirat Yakthung Chumlung appointed him as the priest of this temple in 2005. He lives there with his wife and their five daughters. His is a lifetime appointment and he will continue till he dies. Of late the site has become a popular spot not only for Kirats but also for other communities. Many come for weddings and hold feasts in the temple grounds. Tekbahadur said that, among wedding parties, non-Kirat visitors outnumber the Kirats. Those who come for marriages and picnics include Bahun-Chhetris, Newars, white foreigners, and Muslims. Tekbahadur is asked to preside at Kirati marriages only rarely; normally people bring their own priests with them. Tekbahadur's wife made it clear that she finds the

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behaviour of the young couples who come for picnics embarrassing and inappropriate for a religious site.

Twice a year large numbers of Kirat people gather in this temple: in the month of Baisakh, on the day of Chandi Purnima, to observe Ubhauli (which Limbus call Yakwa Puja or Tangnam) and in the month of Mangsir, to observe Udhauli (called Chasok Tangnam by Limbus). Ubhauli is the festival of plantation while Udhauli is the harvest festival. These two festivals are very important both for Limbus and for Kirats generally. On both occasions around 1,500 people gather at the site.

Until 2006 the followers of the Satyahangma were also accommodated in this temple. In that year they were chased out because they began to perform fire sacrifices, which other Limbus believe have nothing to do with Kirat religious tradition. The Satyahangma also blow conches as Bahuns do. There was a big clash; in the end the Satyahangma people had to leave. They were seen to be behaving like Hindus, which the traditionalist Limbus could not tolerate. The Satyahangma followers allegedly retaliated by spreading a rumour that they would destroy the temple with a bomb.

Since the departure of the Satyahangma followers, no fire sacrifices have been performed in the temple. However, in line with Satyahangma tradition, and indeed since 1990, no animal sacrifices have been allowed within the temple premises either. The Satyahangma people describe this as a victory for their principles. Some however, suspect that the Rais still carry out animal sacrifice secretly once a year, because it is essential for their traditions. According to Uttam Singh Thamden, the chairman of KYC, it is permitted to carry out animal sacrifices somewhere at the foot of the hill, but blood sacrifice is completely forbidden inside the temple premises even though the Satyahangma followers have left the site. Thamden confirmed that it is a tradition to sacrifice a pig during Chasok Tangnam and when performing the *sir uthaune* ritual.

THE NEW SATYAHANGMA TEMPLE

The new Satyahangma temple or Ot Tagera Ningwa Bhumange Sevaro (as written on the signboard) was established in Sankhadevi Village Development Committee (VDC), Lalitpur district, southwest

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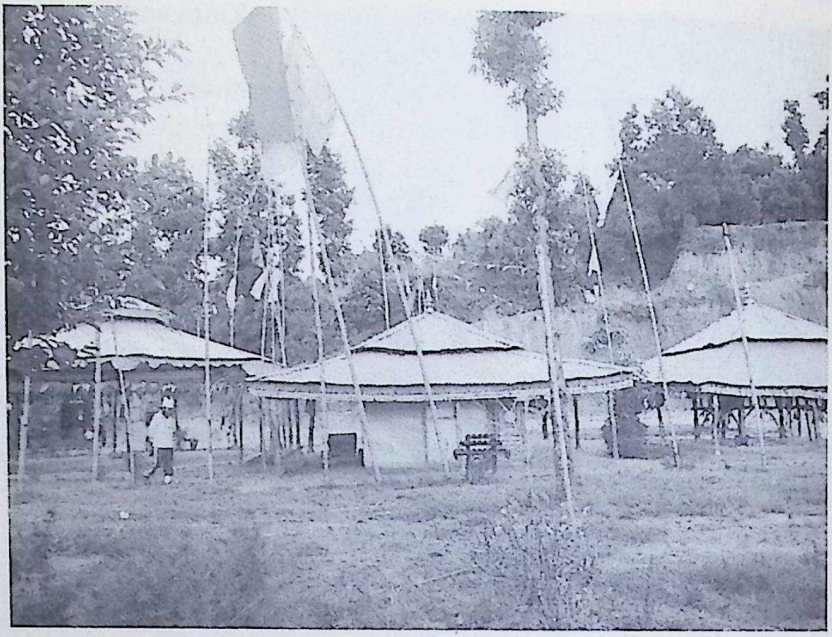

Figure 14.2 Satyahangma Temple in Sankhadevi VDC, Nepal.

Source: B.G. Shrestha (12 September 2011).

of Lubhu VDC. A road goes about half way up the hill; from there one must walk about 400 steps to reach the temple. There is a beautiful view over the Kathmandu Valley from the wooded hilltop. The temple is situated in five ropanis (2542.7 square metres) of land purchased in 2003. Many Satyahangma followers donated to purchase the site.

Some red and white cotton flags fly from the branches of trees close to the temple. At the main entrance the name of the temple is announced on a signboard in both Srijanga and Devanagari scripts; the same signboard requests people not to bring any alcoholic drinks into the premises of the "Kirat Mandir". The resident priest and *sabdi guru* (as ritualists within Satyahangma are called) is Devendra Sherma-Limbu. The house where the fire pit (*agnikunda*) is situated is called Manghing. The Satyahangma temple is made in the shape of the sun and the fire pit is also in imitation of the sun. The main worship place is a rectangular eight-tiered structure called Mujarelung. It represents Kiratesvar Siva. He is known in Limbu as Hansang

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Thewa. He resides in the abode of Kailash Himal. However, there are no images of gods or goddesses. Devendra stated: "Kirat gods reside on the high mountains while the Bahuns' gods reside on the banks of rivers and adjoining cremation grounds."

Every Saturday a fire sacrifice is performed at this temple. It starts at approximately nine or ten in the morning and lasts till two o'clock in the afternoon. Unlike the Sano Hattiban temple, relatively few people visit this site as it is far from human settlements. Those who have certain problems at home, for instance, if someone is sick or someone dies, come to perform fire sacrifice and puja. According to Devendra, only Kirat people visit this site. People offer tridents, as a symbol of Kiratesvar and this is thought to drive away evil spirits.

Devendra, the sabdi guru, is responsible for offering prayers in the temple every day. No red *tika* is applied but only white tika. No rice grains are offered either. Ashes of the fire sacrifice are taken as tika or blessings. A light called *mahabatti* (eternal lamp) is kept burning in the temple. Once Devendra has eaten, he can no longer perform a puja on that day. During the morning prayers, there is recitation of the Mundhum, burning of incense, and changing of water in the *kalasa*. No puja is performed during the daytime but in the evening, soon after the sun sets, passages from the Mundhum are again recited. The Mundhum is regarded "as the Veda of the Kirats".

In addition to daily worship, the principal festivals at the temple are:

1. An annual puja on the first day of Baisakh (mid-April);
2. Chasok Tangnam observed during the harvest time in the month of Kartik/Mangsir (November/December), on the day of Dhanya Purnima;
3. Balihang Tangnam, observed during the Tihar festival;
4. The birth anniversary of Phalgunanda on 25 Kartik (mid-November).

There are many Satyahangma Manghim temples in various parts of Nepal. The movement is particularly attractive to ex-Gurkha soldiers. Outside Nepal, Satyahangma followers are found in eleven different countries, such as in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Saudi Arabia, USA, and the UK. According to sabdi guru Chandra Kumar Sherma, a social worker and author, Satyahangma in Nepal received

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about 6.5 million rupees from devotees in various countries to support its activities. From the UK alone they received 400,000 rupees. The Government of Nepal provides them 1 million rupees every year.

The followers of Phalgunanda have set up an organization called Kirat Religion and Literature Upliftment Association (*Kirat Dharma tatha Sahitya Utthan Sangh*) to promote the teaching of Phalgunanda. It has branches in sixteen different districts in Nepal. Outside Nepal it has branches in nine different countries, such as in India, Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, the UK (opened in 2009), and the USA, among others. Its objectives are:

1. To publish the religious preaching and literature of Muhingum Angsimang.
2. Protection and preservation of Kirat religion, script, literature, culture and costume.
3. Extension of the work of Muhingum Angsimang Lingden Falgunanda for social modification as per the requirement of time.
4. To develop the solidarity among the people for the well being of human being and peace in the world.
5. To establish the world solidarity, religious harmony and peacefulness in the world.
6. To initiate for the minimum functional unification among the Kirati Organization and other religious organizations.
7. Extension of Kirat religion and literature among all human being [sic].
8. To generate the environment for the perforation [sic] of religious preaching, Mundhum reading, Prayer, Austerity and yoga for the devotees as per the Kirat religion.[17]

TRADITIONAL LIMBU FESTIVALS AND THEIR ADAPTATION IN THE UK

The two largest Limbu festivals are Chasok Tangnam and Yakwa Tangnam Puja. As noted above, these are seen as equivalent to what the Rais call Udhauli (harvest festival) and Ubhauli (planting

[17] See www.kirat.org.uk/43/. Accessed on 22 May 2016.

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festival), respectively. Chasok Tangnam falls in the month of Mangsir (December/January); Yakwa Tangnam Puja is on Chandi Purni, the full moon of Baisakh (April/May). Besides these are various other festivals at different times of the year. What is interesting is that one of these lesser festivals, Sisekpa Tangnam, has been adapted by the diaspora as the major occasion to bring all Limbus together, for the simple reason that it takes place in the summer, when it is easier and more pleasant to bring people together outdoors.

By contrast, in Nepal itself it is Chasok Tangnam that has become the major festival for urban Limbus, the one where their public identity is most explicitly on display, in the same way that the newly created Lhochhar (New Year) festival is for Tamangs (Holmberg 2016), Lhosar (New Year) is for Gurungs, the Sakela festival (Gaenszle 2008a: 366–7) is for the Rais, with its "iconic ethnic dance" (Gaenszle 2016: 340–2), the Nepal Samvat celebrations are for Newars, and so on.[18] On 1 March 2008 the Nepal Government declared as a national festival (with three days of official holiday) one festival of each of the main Kirat groups (Chasok Tangnam for the Limbus, Chosowa for the Yakhas, Semuna Sakenwa/Sakela for the Rais, Shandar for the Sunuwars).

In Nepal Chasok Tangnam has in this way become an ethnic festival, a show of strength and an expression of pride, celebrated with mass meetings at Kathmandu's open theatre and other similar venues. Limbu activists generally share the post-1990 critique of Dasain with other Janajati groups, seeing it as a Hindu festival that has been imposed on them by the state and by Bahuns and Chhetris. In so far as it is still observed, it is more as a social occasion.[19] Activists

[18] See Shrestha (2015) on the Nepal Samvat movement. The Rais in the UK organized themselves in the Kirat Rai Yayokkha UK in 2004 and they now have 12 branches across the south of England and Wales. They organize large get-togethers to observe Ubhauli Sakela in May and Yalamabar Remembrance Day in August. In July 2014 they bought 18 acres of land near Woking to act as a Kirat Rai House. Available at: www.kryuk.org.

[19] See Hangen (2010) on the boycott Dasain movement generally and Gaenszle (2010) on the Rais. See also D.B. Angdembe (2011). Pfaff-Czarnecka (1996) demonstrates that the meaning of Dasain was contested even before 1990.

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argue that Dasain is a festival of the Hindu Aryans, and for non-Khas Aryas such as the Limbus to celebrate it is to participate in their own humiliation.

Limbus can take pride in the fact that, like the Newars, but unlike most of Nepal's groups, they have their own script. The felt need for each ethnic group to have their own has been dubbed scriptophilia by Shneiderman and Turin (2006) in the Sikkim context, where the *Sikkim Herald* is published in eleven different languages each in its own script. What the Limbus did not so obviously have until recently was their own 'era' and own New Year's Day. But there is an emerging consensus around celebrating Chasok Tangnam as the Limbu New Year. It is supposedly based on the Kirat era or Yale Tangbe associated with the Kirat dynasty. Kirat intellectuals are yet to agree regarding the exact year of the Yale Tangbe. Some claim it to be older than five millennia, but a calendar (*patro-pancanga*) has recently been issued positing it as 'only' 3,792 years old.[20]

CHASOK TANGNAM IN THE UK

As we have seen, Chasok Tangnam has become the premier Limbu festival in Nepal and is celebrated in the UK both as a politically significant occasion and as a traditional domestic festival with the first harvest offerings made to Him Samang (also known as Himmon) and to Yuma Samang, the ancestor goddess of the Limbus. Shrestha attended this festival, organized by the KYC-UK, in Ashford, UK, in 2011. Ashford was selected because it has the biggest concentration of Limbus in the UK. Although they wanted to celebrate it on the day of the full moon, in the traditional way, they had to hold it on the nearest weekend so that people would be free to participate. The start of the ritual also had to be delayed so that people coming from afar would have time to reach Ashford.

The key ritual took place in the private garden of Siriprasad Limbu, an advisor to KYC-UK. Traditionally the Chasok Tangnam puja takes place near a goddess temple on a hilltop and at least one member

20 *Rajdhani* (12 February 2013) and *Nagarik* (14 January 2013) both reported on the issue. See Rai (2016) for an overview.

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from each household is supposed to be present for the offering. But finding a hilltop in the UK would have been inconvenient, and would have required permission (they thought) from the local council. It was a chilly morning. Padma Prasad Sambahamphe, a Phedangma priest who had recently arrived from Nepal, performed the ritual. He recited some verses from the Mundhum for ten minutes, then sat down, and worshipped nine reed poles with coloured strips of cloth attached. The poles represented nine jungle deities, supposed to be nine sisters.[21]

Padma Prasad moved to the south of the garden in the final part of the ritual and prayed to the goddess Yuma/Himmon. Then in the east he prayed and made offerings to (*i*) Ekthengna Hangma (the first woman or queen who introduced crops on earth); (*ii*) Yuma Samang ('grandmother deity'); (*iii*) Him Samang or Kami Hangma (daughter); and (*iv*) Theba Samang ('grandfather deity'). While making the offerings (a mixture of rice grains, maize, sesame, barley, soybean, black eye beans, and coins), Padma Prasad chanted the Mundhum (see Figure 14.3). Everyone present came to take part by burning incense and offering wick lights to these deities. Padma Prasad announced that today's prayers were offered on behalf of all living beings; it was not necessary to mention any particular family or person's name.

The Mundhum recitation was unintelligible for most participants present. According to Padma Prasad, it recounted the history of creation of the world and living beings (*jagat ra jibko sristiko barema*). In Nepal it is customary for every household to sacrifice a cock on this day, but blood sacrifice is avoided in the UK because it is illegal. In Nepal newly harvested grains are collected from everyone, but in Ashford one of the participants collected money in its place. Every Limbu family is supposed to observe this festival to guarantee good crops in the coming year. It is also an occasion to pay one's respects to Tagera Ningwa Phuma, the Almighty.

[21] The spirits invoked were: Pakha Mangma, Miktap Sunso Pradau Mangma, Tembhoyo Senkha Mangma, Pipuri Yong Khanga Mangma, Makchiri Khovang Mangma, Vadhangi Mangma, Vajjike Vaya Mangma, Vabhunge Varakama Mangma, and Tuduguding Arek Mangma. One extra portion was offered to Lekhali Tonksangmang and two portions to monkeys called Makhukso Sobha Sang and Vaya Khoksum Sang.

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Figure 14.3 Padma Prasad Sambahamphe performing the Chasok Tangnam Puja.

Source: B.G. Shrestha (17 December 2011).

As the puja ended, people walked to the programme venue, in a local community hall. A group of well-dressed young boys and girls standing in front of the main gate of the hall began playing drums (*chyabrung*) and cymbals and started walking and dancing towards the main gate. The participants followed the music group into the hall. Photos of Limbu mythical figures and luminaries, such as Yalambar (Sisuwa Lilim Yakthunghang), Srijanga (Teosin Singthebe), Phalgunanda, and Iman Singh Chemjong, were on display as were handmade traditional sarees, produced in Limbu villages. The chief guest, Yuma Kumari Limbu, the senior-most Limbu lady residing in the UK, inaugurated the programme by lighting an oil lamp. This was followed, as is conventional, by speeches from KYC-UK officials and other guests and then cultural performances with songs and dances. The day was also the occasion to celebrate the New Year 5071 according to the Yalé era (using a different calculation to that mentioned above).

Chasok Tangnam is also the day of Sirijanga's (1704–41) anniversary. Sirijanga is credited with the reintroduction of the Limbu script (which is also known as Sirijanga). Limbus claim that an ancient

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eighth century Limbu king, Sirijanga, introduced the script originally, but it was lost; it was revived by the second Sirijanga in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but again it was lost. In the eighteenth century, the third Sirijanga reintroduced this script.[22]

Some KYC-UK members made presentations on their plans to purchase some property to provide a permanent home for the KYC-UK. Certificates were presented to life members, patrons, and those who had contributed financially to the KYC-UK. The formal programme ended around 4 p.m., but dancing continued for more than an hour.

SISEKPA TANGNAM IN THE UK

Sisekpa Tangnam falls in the month of Srawan (July/August). A key part of the festival is the expulsion of evil spirits from homes and localities. On this day Limbus offer maize to their gods. People tie leaves from green vegetables such as cucumber, pumpkin, pipal leaves, with half-matured rice plants in a rope and hang it over the main entrance of the house. In the evening, after feasting and drinking *tongba*, they take a burning wood log and winnowing tray to every nook and cranny of the house, while drumming. Then they throw the log and the winnowing tray out of the main door to expel the evil spirits (Hembya 2012; Wanem 2012).

In the UK, from 2004 onwards, Sisekpa Tangnam began to be celebrated under the aegis of the KYC-UK as a way to bring all Limbus together once a year. In 2011 it was a huge success with a gathering of almost 5,000 people in Ashford. In 2012 the KYC-UK was compelled to cancel the venue in Ashford as the owner admitted he did not have enough manpower to provide security for such a massive gathering. At the last moment the KYC changed the venue to Feltham Community College, Feltham, where Shrestha attended.

[22] Chemjong (1966 [1948]: 83) talks about the invention of Kirat scripts such as Rong script and "Shirijunga" script. Subba (1995: 31–2) states that Sirijanga script was derived and evolved from Brahmi script after sixth century CE and introduced to the Kirat Limbus by King Sirijanga. Quoting Kainla (1992), he claims that it disappeared for almost 800 years and that Te-Ongsi Sirijanga Thebe (the second Sirijanga) revived it and brought into practice again. See also Dhungel (2006) and Subba (1995: 309–11) for more on Sirijanga script.

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A stage was set up on the northern edge of the playground and an open space was kept in front for the *kelang*, traditional Limbu dances. On the west side of the stage a huge tent was set up where many chairs were placed for the distinguished guests to take their seats and watch the stage performances and the dances. On this occasion the chief guest was Ram Bahadur Begha Limbu, a Gurkha veteran and a winner of the Victoria Cross. Pradeep Kumar Rai (Byakul Maila), the author of the new (republican) national anthem of Nepal, and Kumar Lingden, the chairman of the Limbuwan Sanghiya Parisad, had been invited from Nepal as special guests. Many other guests from various local and Nepali diaspora organizations were also present.

The programme began around 1 p.m. with the singing of both Nepali and UK national anthems. The audience was greatly excited by the fact that Byakul Maila, the author of Nepal's anthem, was present on the podium to sing it. The chief guest, Ram Bahadur Begha Limbu, inaugurated the programme by lighting candles that were placed on two ceremonial lamps. After a welcome dance and then a speech from the KYC-UK vice president, some guests were invited to speak. Kumar Lingden took the opportunity to explain about federalism, the necessity of a Limbuwan province, Janajati rights, and Brahminism (*bahunbad*). He urged Limbus in the UK to support the Limbuwan movement. After his speech, a few songs were presented. Then Byakul Maila gave his speech; he urged diaspora Nepalis to work to strengthen Nepal.

The presentation of letters of appreciation to senior citizens, graduate students, patrons, life members, advisors, and executive members was also a part of the programme. In between songs and dances were performed. Most of the announcements and speeches were in Nepali. By contrast, the singers sang only Limbu songs, and dances were performed to Limbu songs. (The songs at the Chasok Tangnam celebration described above had been in Nepali.)

The final part of the day's programme was devoted to competitive dancing. In these traditional Chyabrung dances, girls dance and boys both drum and dance. At the centre of the dancing area there was a winnowing tray containing a head of a pig or a big lump of meat and a bottle of alcohol. Each dance group consisted of five to eight pairs of dancers. The teams represented the seven different branches of the KYC-UK at that time: from Ashford, Colchester, Folkestone, Greater London, London South West, Oxford, and Rushmoor. After the

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Figure 14.4 Chyabrung dance competition, Feltham.

Source: B.G. Shrestha (13 June 2012).

distribution of prizes to the winning dancers the formal programme of the day ended.

Unlike the Chasok Tangnam celebration, no rituals were carried out on this day.[23] It was almost 8 p.m. but informal dances continued. Roughly 4,000 people participated in the event. Families and friends came in groups and set up temporary tents. Many brought food and drink from home, but for those who did not there were food stalls selling all different kinds of Nepalese food and barbecue packages. Beer, wine, whisky, and homemade *tongba* (beer) were also available.

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On the one hand, Limbus in the UK are keen to retain and foster links with each other and to maintain and pass on their traditions

[23] There is a parallel here to the way Dasain and Tihar are celebrated in the ethnically mixed Oxford Nepali community: that is to say, with minimal religious ritual (a simple and ambiguous flask set up on stage), so that a shared and non-contentious vaguely Nepali cultural framework can be established and a shared communal celebration held, while different religious, cultural, and ethnic traditions are bracketed and effectively ignored (Pariyar, Shrestha, and Gellner 2014: 143–4).

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to their children born and brought up away from Nepal. At the same time, there is definitely frequent interchange and a strong awareness of what other groups are doing. The numerically largest group among UK Nepalis is the Gurungs (see Chapters 15 and 17 in this volume). Their ethnic organization, the Tamu Dhee UK, organizes several major annual events, including a New Year celebration (around the same time as the UK mainstream new year), the Nepali Mela (or fair), to which all Nepali groups are invited, and an annual barbecue/picnic. They also, since 2000, hold the annual Gurkha Cup, a tournament in which 7-a-side football teams of various ages and strengths compete in front of—if their website is to be believed—12,000 spectators. The success of the Gurkha Cup has led other Janajati organizations to follow suit, so there is since 2008 the Lakhan Thapa Cup organized by the Magar Samaj UK and the Yalambar Cup organized by the KYC-UK, also since 2008. All these Janajati organizations aspire (depending on their size and resources) to have their own community building, to provide support for members in cases of bereavement (see Chapter 15 below), to organize lively and successful community meetings (as described in this chapter), to preserve their culture and language, and to support movements of co-ethnics in Nepal. These Nepali groups, while primarily oriented towards their own members, to other Nepalis in the UK, and to Nepal itself, are also keen to have good relations with local councillors and other prominent local figures in the towns where they are settled in the UK.

As the discussion above makes clear, the KYC-UK seeks to unite Limbus all over the UK and has an increasing number of branches throughout the country. At the same time, the Phalgunanda followers in the UK are busy with their own meetings, celebrations, and rituals. We were both present at an impressive Mangseva ritual (including complex liturgy and fire sacrifice) held in Coates Park, Swindon, in May 2012 (Gellner 2015: 80). Unlike in Nepal, as we have described in the case of the Sano Hattiban pilgrimage site, there is no unfriendly atmosphere between the two groups of Limbus in the UK. Some Limbus are happy to participate in the activities of both sides and many Limbu extended families have adherents of both traditions.

The enthusiastic participation and large turnout of the younger generation in activities such as the football competitions and dance competitions show that organizations like the KYC-UK are, on the

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face of it, very successful in preserving their particular ethnic culture in this very new diaspora situation. But adaptations and changes have had to be made, as noted above. Sisekpa Tangnam, a minor festival to do with expelling evil spirits, has been transformed into a major community gathering and affirmation of ethnic pride. Festivals are observed on the nearest available Saturday or Sunday in order to fit in with people's work schedules. Animal sacrifice and loud public singing are avoided in order not to offend the sensibilities of the host society. In all these ways there has been adaptation and invention. With the changing of generations that process of creative change is bound to continue in future.[24]

[24] On the Nepali youth music scene, see van Oomen (2014).

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15

DEATH AND SOCIETY

THE PERFORMANCE OF GURUNG DEATH RITES IN THE UK

Florence Gurung

DEALING WITH THE DEATH OF a loved one in diaspora can be a difficult and unsettling experience. Relatives of the deceased must struggle to find the right way both to ensure a good death and positive path for their loved one, and to enable themselves to come to terms with their loss in a situation where traditional customs may be hard to follow, and where the usual networks of kin or other support may be unavailable. As scholars of other migrant communities have noted, the ways in which people deal with death, and the extent to which they feel it is possible to carry out satisfactorily the required death rites and customs, can be indicative of their sense of belonging in their adopted home, with the decision to return to the country of origin for last rites sometimes read as a sign of a lack of integration within or lack of attachment to the country of residence (Gardner 1998: 516–17; 2002: 199; Oliver 2004: 236, 243–9). At the same time, the process of arranging and conducting a funeral can help create or strengthen a sense of belonging, forcing migrants to negotiate and engage with local systems and customs, and also reinforcing connections within

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the diasporic community, both within the adopted country and across transnational networks (Zihr 2012). Dealing with death can also bring to the fore issues around the preservation of ethnic identity. The need to maintain certain traditional practices may appear more urgent at death and yet the question of the degree of adaptation which may be allowable, if those traditions are to remain meaningful, leaves many in a state of uncertainty. This uncertainty regarding ethnic identity, in an environment where ethnic identity often becomes more self-conscious and overt, can be a further obstacle in attaining a sense of belonging in the diaspora.

The concept of 'belonging' has received much attention amongst social scientists in recent years and yet, despite many interesting attempts to define it, remains a very broad concept which can be used in different ways for different purposes. Often it has been employed as an alternative to 'identity', a term which has fallen into disfavour because of its essentialist connotations, in discussions of collective identity or 'groupness' (Brubaker 2002; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011). Here analysts may refer to 'belonging' as they seek to determine what it is that makes members of a group or category feel bonded to one another and to feel that they are 'insiders' rather than 'outsiders'. To 'belong', in this sense, may be about a sense of commonality (of sharing something with other members of the group, be it cultural characteristics, experiences of marginalization, or particular values), of mutuality (sharing goals or interests), and of connectedness (being tied to other members of the group through kin or other networks) (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011; Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011). It also has a strong emotive aspect, pointing to what many might acknowledge as a universal human need to fit in, to be accepted, to belong. Scholars of migration, meanwhile, have discussed the notion of belonging with regard to place, and suggest that to 'belong' is to feel 'safe' or 'at home' in a particular environment (Anthias 2006: 21; Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011: xiv; Yuval-Davis 2006: 197; Low in Chapter 7 above). Here the analytical focus may be on what factors allow individuals or groups to feel that they 'belong' in a non-native place or nation-state (rights, recognition, lack of discrimination, and so on) or at what the host society regards as the minimum criteria for their belonging to be acknowledged or accepted (a certain degree of integration, respect for laws and customs, among others).

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These two areas, belonging to a group and belonging to or in a place, often represent quite separate fields of study, but there are ways in which they interconnect. In the Nepali context, of course, many ethnic groups, or indigenous nationalities, have claimed historical and cultural links with particular places with the accompanying demand that such a connection should give their members the right to govern those territories (Gellner 2011; Krauskopff 2011). But also in the context of diaspora studies, for some migrants, many of my informants among them, group belonging is a pre-requisite of belonging in a place. Many described how as isolated migrants (arriving before 2004 when settlement rights were granted to a large proportion of Nepali ex-Gurkhas) they could not feel at home, but the presence of a supportive community within which they felt secure made permanent settlement possible.

Among Gurung migrants in the UK, the performance of death rites, and the debates around how they can or should be performed in the UK, have impacted on individuals' sense of belonging both to the UK, as their new country of residence, and within a broadly defined Gurung community, in various ways. Indeed, for Gurungs, debates surrounding the 'correct' performance of death rites have particular salience. Many ethnographers have commented that the Gurungs' is a society much concerned with death (Messerschmidt 1976: 84; Pignède 1993: 281, 362; Pettigrew 1995: 144). At least in the Gurung 'heartland' areas of mid-West Nepal, funerals and post-funerary death rites are the most widely attended and usually incur the greatest expenditure of any ritual occasion. In contrast to Parbatiya society, funerals are considered more important occasions than weddings. The importance of the Gurung funeral, and in particular the post-funerary rites or *arghaun*, which can take place at any time from a few days to years after the death, has several aspects. First, as with any funeral, it provides the grieving family the opportunity to carry out their obligations to the deceased, ensuring that they pass on to a good place and find peace. While various rituals are carried out at the burial or cremation,[1] the soul of the deceased is said to remain among the living until the

[1] Both burial and cremation are common. The choice is partly dependent on locality: some villages cremate, some bury, and some do both. Some elderly informants recollect that burial used to be the more usual among Gurungs

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arghaun has taken place. Furthermore, if the arghaun is not successfully performed, the restless soul is likely to return as a *moh* spirit and give trouble to the family, causing bad luck and sickness. Second, the arghaun is an important rite for re-establishing or reaffirming relationships among the living. Arghauns are large affairs, attended by everyone in the local community as well as relatives from afar. Anyone with any connection to the deceased is expected to attend and to refuse is to breach social ties (Des Chene 1998: 31).

In addition, Gurung funeral rites have recently taken on a third significance as they have been appropriated, or at least emphasized, by leaders of the cultural revival movement. The arghaun, as a uniquely Gurung occasion, has come to be viewed as an important occasion on which to enact or display Gurung culture and ethnic identity. The rite is also at the centre of a controversy within the community with regard to the nature of the religious identity of the Gurungs, whether they should claim Tibetan Buddhism or a form of shamanism that they have come to refer to as Bon, as their own. The main debate is over which type of religious specialist should perform the ritual: the *pachyu* and *klyepri*, traditional Gurung priests or shamans, or a Buddhist lama?[2] However eclectic their daily practices, each family must make a choice between funerary practitioners, and such choices may therefore be taken, by community leaders at least, as an indication

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and suggest that cremation has grown due to Hindu influence and, at least in Pokhara, because of the limited land available for burial. Most agree that today the majority choose to cremate. The priests of the Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh concur, claiming that their oral texts, the *pe*, state that the dead should be buried and that therefore cremation is relatively new to Gurung culture, but they are nonetheless willing to accept cremation.

[2] There are various spellings of pachyu and klyepri in the literature. Almost every ethnographer of the Gurungs has used a different one which must, in part, be a reflection of regional differences in pronunciation: Pignède (1993 [1966]) in Kaski, used *pucu* and *klihbrī*; Messerschmidt (1976) in Lamjung used *pajyu* and *khepre*; Mumford (1989) in Manang used *paju* and *ghyabre*; Macfarlane (1976) in Kaski used *pachyu* and *khlibri*; Pettigrew used *pachyu* and *klyeprī* in her thesis (Pettigrew 1995) but *klehbrī* in *Grounding Knowledge, Walking Land* (Evans et al. 2009); while Evans, in the same work, preferred *kyabri*. The Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh suggests that some spellings are more correct than others. One representative told me that *ghyabre* suggests a

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of the relative importance of these two traditions. Related to this delicate issue is the question of whether or not to include animal sacrifice: the promoters of Gurung shamanism insist that sacrifice is essential, while the Buddhist lamas teach that blood sacrifice is wrong.

In this chapter I discuss how these death rites are performed by Gurungs in the UK, specifically in the town of Farnborough and the surrounding area where I carried out fieldwork between 2010 and 2012. I examine how far the Gurungs residing in the UK are seeking to, and how far they are able to, carry out the practices considered necessary in Nepal. The chapter considers at once the bureaucratic and practical obstacles faced, and increasingly overcome, in performing Gurung death rites in the UK, and the adaptation of traditional practices which has gradually been leading to the development of a degree of standardization in the way Gurung funerals are conducted in the UK. I suggest that the growing ability of the community to achieve satisfaction in this area both indicates and has, in various ways, enabled a strengthening of belonging in the UK.

I also examine the ways in which practices continue to be contested and negotiated, with debates over cultural practices in the UK shaped partly by the UK environment but also reflecting similar debates in Nepal. As long as *jat* (caste/ethnic group) remains a significant mode of identification for Gurungs in the UK,[3] issues related to belonging

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pronunciation more Nepali than Gurung. He explained that the word pachyu has a meaning in Gurung, indicating someone who can communicate with an unseen power and can separate bad spirits from a person who is suffering; *klye*, he suggested, is the Gurung name for Ghale, and the klyepri were originally priests of the Ghale kings.

3 *Jat* continues to be important to many and *jat* associations are among the largest and most active community organizations among Nepalis in the UK. That *jat* should remain a relevant organizing principle for Nepalis outside Nepal was not inevitable, although in most other countries with a large population of Nepalis, such as the US, Australia, and Hong Kong, community organization along *jat* lines has also occurred (Hangen 2014; Minami 2007). Clearly, the continued salience of *jat* is related to the development of ethnic politics in Nepal and, with reference to the UK and Hong Kong, possibly also to the particular history of Nepali migration to those countries, with the majority of migrants being ex-Gurkhas who were traditionally recruited from a small number of Janajati groups (Caplan 1995). However, in other parts of

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within the Gurung community must continue to affect the ability of many members to feel settled and at home in the UK. This chapter thus further examines the ways in which Gurung death rites at once support and compromise the building of a Gurung community both in terms of reaffirming relations and in the more intangible sense of evoking and extending a world of shared cultural meanings—a Tamu *yul*—which might make life in the UK more meaningful.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT: HOW DO YOU ORGANIZE A FUNERAL?

The UK's Nepali population has grown enormously since 2005 and particularly after 2009 following government rulings which granted first ex-Gurkhas who had retired after 1997, and then all ex-Gurkhas with at least four years' service, the right to settle in Britain. This growth has brought the problem of how to deal with death into focus as, with the increase in elderly migrants, many more people have had to grapple with this issue. But this has also meant that the community has become more experienced and more effective, at least in addressing the practical problems encountered when dealing with death in the UK.

Man Bahadur Gurung described to me how he was faced with the task of organizing a Gurung funeral when a relative died of cancer in 2010.[4] He initially had no idea how to approach this task and being relatively new to the country himself was somewhat daunted by the responsibility. However, using his initiative, he soon learned how to get a death certificate and find a funeral director. He learned that Cooperative Funerals could help in providing a certificate so that the ashes could pass safely through customs when sent back to Nepal (important as the ashes would be needed for the arghaun) and that the funeral directors were more than happy to host a lama playing a *dangro* (drum). He found funding from various sources, including the Gurkha Welfare Trust, and even managed to apply for funeral

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the diaspora *jat* may be less relevant. In Belgium, for instance, while ethnic organizations do exist, organizations with a political party affiliation are more prominent (Gellner, Hausner, and Shrestha 2014).

[4] I have used pseudonyms throughout to preserve the anonymity of my informants.

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funding from the government with help from the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB). Man Bahadur was proud of his achievement, and as an active social worker, was keen to share his knowledge with others in the community. Cooperative Funerals, Farnborough, has since hosted several Gurung funerals.

Man Bahadur is not the only one to wish to share his knowledge and experience. Countless Nepali associations have sprung up based on a single village, group of villages, district, or *bhai khalak* (clan or patrilineage). Often their main aim is 'welfare' which includes, above all else, helping families in the event of death. This help is largely financial, as funding can be a major concern. Many elderly couples have migrated without working-age children and are living on pension credit (a government benefit which tops up a low pension). For them the expense of any kind of funeral, even without fulfilling the Gurung expectation that large numbers of guests must be accommodated and fed, is beyond their means. These local societies often require each household to make a specified contribution on the death of a member. The larger national Tamu/Gurung organizations may also contribute if there is a need.[5] Tamu Dhee UK, one of the largest Nepali associations in the UK, will contribute £1,000 from their funds on the death of a life member and will approach members for voluntary contributions, if further assistance is needed, such as for repatriation of the body or, if requested, to help a non-member. Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh (TPLS), the other national Gurung organization, has also begun a system of collecting compulsory donations from members when a fellow life member dies and they too will try to help non-members if the need arises.

Besides financial help, these local associations offer support in the organization and management of funerals; this assistance may be equally valued. When Dil Kumari's father died, the Lamjung Samaj women's group and men's group met to discuss what was to be done. They took care of all the arrangements, decided which lama to call, who was to bring what, and divided the necessary jobs between them. Similarly, when Prem Bahadur Gurung passed away, his *bhai khalak* held several meetings to organize everything that was needed. In both cases the families decided not to accept financial help, but the

5 Tamu is the word Gurungs use for themselves, so Man Bahadur Gurung may also call himself Man Bahadur Tamu.

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experience, contacts, and manpower offered by community organizations were a great support.

AVAILABILITY OF RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS

Another way in which the growth of the Nepali population in the UK has made the provision of Gurung funerals easier is the increase in the number of religious specialists available to perform death rites. Ten or even five years ago there was little possibility of performing a traditional Gurung funeral in the UK as there were no pachyu or klyepri (Gurung shamans or priests) or Nepali Buddhist lamas serving the community. However, this is no longer the case. There are currently at least six Nepali 'household' lamas, most of whom are themselves ex-Gurkhas, and all of whom are called upon to perform funerals in the UK, as well as two more senior Tibetan Buddhist lamas working for the Brigade of Gurkhas who are occasionally allowed to officiate at civilian rituals if there is no conflict with their army duties (see Figure 15.1). Since my fieldwork ended, these have also been joined, in

Figure 15.1 The altar of the Buddhist arghaun ceremony conducted by Lama Chiwong for Bom Bahadur Gurung at Tamu Dhee House, Mytchett.

Source: F. Gurung (10 August 2011).

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Figure 15.2 At the end of the ceremony Bom Bahadur's two mourning sons receive new Nepali caps (*topi*) from their maternal uncle.

Source: D.N. Gellner (10 August 2011).

July 2014, by two lamas from Shechen Gompa to preside over the newly established Tibetan Buddhist temple in Aldershot.

Pachyu and klyepri are also present in the UK and are organized through the Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh (TPLS) UK. The klyepri is primarily a death specialist and the pachyu is an exorcist, healer, and death specialist (Pettigrew 1995). In death rites both are required and have different roles to fill. At the time of my fieldwork, a total of six klyepri and eight pachyu were available in the UK. Although not all were qualified or experienced enough to take full responsibility for performing death rites, at any one funeral all who could do so, would attend. There were also three young trainee pachyus and a number of individuals who could be called upon to assist. At one funeral I attended in Farnborough there were, at one time, nine pachyu and klyepri seated around the coffin reading or reciting, with two more moving in and out to bring items required for the ritual. At an arghaun performed in Woolwich in March 2011 all fourteen *khegi* (priests) were present

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at one time or another. Such a large number is not usually required, although a minimum of three pachyu and three klyepri is expected, but as these priests were all 'part-timers', the duties had to be shared between them. There had been some difficulty in booking a senior klyepri, without whom the ritual could not have been performed. The usual *klyepri chiba* (chief or head klyepri) was unable to attend due to work commitments, but another, who was due to return from Nepal shortly, was flown back early so that he could take part. Others came and went, as their other duties allowed, using up annual leave from their day jobs if necessary. All the ritualists I have encountered have been deeply committed and insist that if they are called to attend a ritual, it is their duty to go, however difficult it may be. I came across both pachyu and klyepri and Buddhist lamas who had gone straight from a night shift at work to an all-day puja, forgoing sleep in order to fulfil their duty and ensure that the necessary rituals were carried out as well as they could be.

REAFFIRMATION OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY TIES

The growing number of migrants also means funerals in the UK can now be an opportunity to reaffirm relations within the community. It is important for large numbers to attend a Gurung funeral, and for all those people to be fed in the name of the deceased. Death rites, therefore, provide the opportunity for Gurungs to demonstrate publicly their belonging to the community (or a part of it) through attendance, as well as for organizers to demonstrate to those assembled that Gurung tradition is being upheld, and this performative element of funeral proceedings can now be achieved in the UK.[6] There were several hundred mourners at each of the funerals I attended and at one, for a young Gurkha soldier who had been killed in Afghanistan, there were over 1,000 people present. The vast majority had no personal connection with the deceased; they had never met him, but for many there was some link which made them feel that they had to attend. Phul Maya had not been intending to go but when she discovered that the boy was from a neighbouring village to her *maiti* (parental home)

[6] See Hausner (2016) for a discussion of the distinction between ritual performance and practice with reference to Gurungs in diaspora.

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she felt she had to. She did not know the deceased herself, but knew of his family and where their house was. She did not live far from Aldershot, where the funeral took place, but some relatives of hers travelled all the way from Nuneaton. They did not know the deceased either, but made the journey because of the shared village connection.

Many people told me that to attend the funeral of anyone was considered good and you should do so if you hear about it and you are free. In the cities of Nepal, one might attend the funeral of someone living in the local neighbourhood, for example, and in the UK some said they would attend the funeral of anyone within the Nepali community, although they would be more likely to attend if the deceased were of the same clan or *numberi* (one who joined the Gurkhas in the same year). They might also attend if they had some new, even loose connection with the deceased, forged in the UK. For example, one non-Gurung I met at a Gurung funeral said that he had attended because the father-in-law of the daughter of the deceased was president of the Bracknell Nepalese Society, of which he was a member. However, most insisted that there is an obligation to attend if the deceased is related or from the same ancestral village.[7]

Des Chene (1992) has described the concept of Tamu *yul* as a kind of 'Gurung world' where Gurungs are connected with others through kinship relations and systems of interdependence and within which Gurung cosmological beliefs prevail. Mukta Tamang (2009) has described a similar concept among the Tamangs, where the term *yul* refers to a territory and the deities associated with it. While for Tamangs the term also relates to the land or soil itself, Des Chene emphasises that Tamu *yul* is not a geographical location, but a place of belonging, relatedness, and ancestry within which Gurung ways prevail (1992: 2) and she argues that in cities such as Pokhara and Butwal, where satellite communities have developed in which village ties retain their salience (1992: 7), Tamu *yul* is in operation. In this context, migrants to the city remain tied to each through mutual obligation (systems of exchange) and, while they appreciate the advantages of urban living, they also share a continued commitment to Gurung values and ways of life.

7 See de Sales (2011) on how loyalty and attachment to the village continues to be strongly felt among Nepalis even after they have migrated to the city or abroad.

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In the UK, it is through these large funeral gatherings, which Gurungs will make every effort to attend, that family and village relations are reaffirmed and something resembling Tamu *yul* can be recreated. While going about their daily lives, the extent to which individuals interact with Gurungs with whom they share ancestral links may vary, but at death, obligations towards kin, clan, and village are brought to the fore. As mentioned above, it is usually the *bhai khalak* (patrilineage) or village society which takes the lead in organizing the funeral and often also in collecting funds to pay for it. At the funeral itself, *bhai khalak* members must take prominent positions: *bhai khalak* members carry the coffin and must also support the nine bamboo poles which hold up the *bato kapada* or *kyakoin*, a white cloth which leads the funeral procession (see below). Other family members, including those outside the *bhai khalak* have particular roles to play in the funeral proceedings (the maternal uncle has a pivotal role). As shown below, funerals in the UK attempt to honour those traditions in form, even where the required kin cannot be present. In this way the connections that mattered in Nepal are given weight and meaning in the UK where, without such efforts, they could easily be broken and forgotten.

OBSTACLES AND ADAPTATIONS

Thanks to the changes described earlier in the chapter, most families now choose to perform the first part of the funeral in the UK. Repatriation of the corpse does still occur sometimes: if most of the family are in Nepal and unable to come, it may be preferred, but it is expensive and complicated. However, there are still many questions over how to conduct a funeral in the UK. Some adaptation has to be made, to get round practical obstacles encountered in the UK system. For example, in Nepal the burial or cremation would normally take place very soon after death, but in the UK there is often a delay of some weeks before a slot becomes available at the crematorium or while family members travel from abroad. This need not necessarily be an issue but can cause some uncertainty. In one case, two lamas had been called to do the funeral rites and they could not agree on the date of the *sheme kain*, the ceremony of feeding the dead. This is normally performed three days after death. One lama felt that the

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sheme kain should be three days after the cremation, but the other, because he had performed part of the funeral puja the day before the actual cremation, wanted to do it one day earlier. A layman was forced to make the decision for them and based it on practices he remembered from his village; the *sheme kain* was held three days after the cremation, but he was not at all confident that they were doing the right thing.

The lack of time at the crematorium is another issue. Generally the crematorium allows only one hour for a service and only part of this is given to the lama or Gurung priest. Most do further rituals at the home of the deceased or funeral director's before and after. But at people's homes there is the issue of both space and noise. Many worry that the *dangro* (drum) makes too much noise and will upset neighbours.[8] The issues of noise and space are even greater when it comes to the arghaun. Tamu Dhee UK owns a hall in Mytchett, Tamu Dhee House, which has been used for such events, but even here there is some anxiety about disturbing the neighbours. No one has yet complained, but people worry that they might. Many in the community have spoken of the need for a suitable building that could be used by Gurungs and others in the Nepali community for death ceremonies and a number of organizations have initiated projects of this kind. A Hindu organization based in Farnborough, Shiva Culture, which has both Nepali and Indian members, is trying to acquire property and NRNAUK has also talked about creating such a space.

The Buddhist Community Centre UK has made the most progress in this area (Gurung 2015). They successfully raised money to purchase a property in Aldershot which, following extensive work to convert the building into a monastery, was consecrated in July 2014. With the arrival of two lamas from Nepal, the gompa has begun a programme of regular pujas and fasting rituals and they have also begun to use this space for funerals and arghauns conducted in the Buddhist manner. The lack of an appropriate space to perform lengthy rituals still remains an issue for those who choose to employ pachyu and klyepri priests at death, however. The leaders of TPLS have begun

[8] A similar concern about certain traditional customs being too noisy and possibly disturbing neighbours was voiced by members of the Nepali community in Oxford, as discussed in Pariyar, Shrestha, and Gellner (2014: 144).

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their own fundraising programme in order to establish a religious and cultural centre which would celebrate the Gurungs' shamanic heritage and provide a space for death rites and other rituals.

Gurung funerals require that particular relatives perform a number of specific, and very important, roles so the absence of certain kin can sometimes present a further obstacle. However, while disappointing for the family, and requiring some adaptation of traditional practices, the absence of these individuals seems not to be critical for the successful performance of the rites. Where possible, the children of the deceased should be present and usually, even if they are not already based in the UK, they will come. But if it is not possible, a brother's child or other close relative can stand in for a son or daughter and this is acceptable. At one funeral I attended the burial was put off for nearly a month while they waited for one of the sons to come, but in the end he was unable to get a visa. In this case, the deceased's brother (cousin) took on the son's duties although parts of the ceremony were postponed to be carried out later in Nepal. The same is true of the *asyo/mama* (mother's brother) and *moh/chhori juwain* (son-in-law) who also have important roles in the funeral proceedings: if they cannot be present, the closest male relative available can take their place.

The extent to which relatives are prepared to take on the roles expected of them and follow these traditions is variable. For example, when the *bhai khalak* of Prem Bahadur arranged his funeral, they were less than impressed with the commitment of his sons. They came to the funeral, one of them travelling from Hong Kong in order to attend, but they were not prepared to shave their eyebrows or follow the fasting expected of them for thirteen days. However, it is likely that the same issues would have come up had the death occurred in Nepal, as the younger generation, brought up in Pokhara and Kathmandu, are not always willing to follow customs that were practised in the village.

EMERGING NEW FORMS

While adaptations clearly have to be made, there is still some attempt to make the service resemble that of a funeral in Nepal and, at least in the case of TPLS-organized funerals, a standard shape to the service is beginning to emerge. At the funeral parlour or house, while

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some *khegi* chant their texts inside next to the coffin, other helpers and family members prepare the necessary materials. At the funerals I observed, preliminary preparations were made in the car park of the funeral parlour (Figures 15.3 and 15.4). While the pachyu beat their drums to call the ancestors and inform them of the recent death, the son, or other close male relative if the son is unable to attend, constructs the *ala*, a large bamboo pole which, in Nepal, would be erected at the house of the deceased to indicate that a death has occurred, and the *bato kapada* (Nepali), or *kyakoin* (Gurung), a piece of white cloth less than eight metres long, held up by nine bamboo poles, which leads the way. These are two very visible symbols that Gurung tradition is being maintained. This stage takes around four hours and guests arrive gradually, drinking tea and chatting with friends and paying little attention to the rituals being performed outside and around the coffin. In some funerals, before the cortege leaves for the cemetery or crematorium there is a final ritual, the *labru yaba*, which the mourners are expected to observe. In this the pachyu and klyepri

Figure 15.3 Pachyu and klyepri priests exit from the funeral parlour, at the end of a funeral in Farnborough.

Source: F. Gurung (17 April 2012).

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Figure 15.4 Kleypri priests chanting over the coffin.

Source: F. Gurung (17 April 2012).

dance around the coffin followed by the son shooting arrows in four directions to open the way.[9]

At the crematorium, mourners gather outside and line up along the path to the entrance. Members of the *bhai khalak* hold up the *bato kapada* or *kyakoin*. They lead the procession, behind the religious specialist, and are followed by the hearse, after which come the immediate family and then all other mourners. Once inside guests scramble to find seats, although the vast majority have to stand at the back or outside as the space provided is never sufficient for the numbers who attend. Family members and community leaders then make speeches while the lama or pachyu and klyepri perform a short ritual. At the end, all guests walk around the coffin offering flowers and *khada*, and, as they leave, they are purified with *choko pani* (blessed water) and incense. At a burial I attended in Aldershot, the ceremony was similar. The guests gathered around the coffin in a very large circle

9 The *labru yaba* is only performed when the deceased had relatives or ancestors who were pachyu or klyepri.

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while speeches were made and the *khegi* continued to chant. At the end they formed a line to place their offerings on the coffin and then later, when the coffin had been lowered into the ground, to throw in handfuls of earth and leaves.

When the ceremony is complete, drinks and snacks are provided to all guests. This catering can be in the grounds of the crematorium (in the car park on one occasion) or at a local Nepali restaurant. There is often a third stage held at the home of the deceased or one of his relatives, which can go on through the night, but I have not been able to observe this.[10] Gurung funeral proceedings have thus taken on a relatively standard shape in the UK and organizers no longer have to make new decisions at every step. Certain symbolic visual elements of the ceremony are retained (the construction of the *ala* and *bato kapada*, duties of the required kin, the 'feasting', among others), allowing mourners to get the sense that tradition is being upheld, even while many details have to be adapted (the materials used and location of the construction, the individuals taking on those duties and so on). Although the nature of the adaptations which might be necessary was not obvious at first, with time they have come to be seen as inevitable. Most mourners are guided in these practices by the priests and leaders of the TPLS, or the lamas whom they employ, who now have much experience and a degree of confidence in arranging such matters and of using the space and resources they have available.

GURUNG SHAMANS OR BUDDHIST LAMAS?

In addition to the practical considerations and restrictions that have to be navigated, various decisions, only partly related to the UK

[10] I write about TPLS funerals because these are the ones I have been able to attend, but from what I have discovered through conversation and photographs, the lama-led funerals are similar in shape if not in content. The proceedings follow a similar structure: a short ritual at the funeral parlour before moving to the crematorium; a procession with *bato kapada* (a tradition shared by many other Nepali ethnic groups); speeches and puja with the coffin on display; mourners leave offerings and are purified as they leave. The content of the lama's ritual, however, differs from that of the Gurung priests, although most laymen are unable to say how.

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environment, also have to be made by each family according to their own needs. One of the most important of these is whether to call a lama or a pachyu and klyepri to officiate. As noted above, both are now available in the UK. Much of the literature on Gurungs suggests that it was common some time ago to call either pachyu and klyepri, or lama and pachyu, but that recently it has become popular to call lamas only (Mumford 1989; Pignède 1993 [1966]; Pettigrew 1995; Tamblyn 2002). Pettigrew has described how the Gurung priests of Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh are deeply concerned by this development and see lamas as encroaching on their ritual domain. Lama arghauns are usually shorter, lasting one or two days rather than the traditional three, and are therefore cheaper.

In Nepal the factor which most influences who you call is which village you come from. Each Gurung village has its own particular way of doing things, often dictated at least in part by which kind of priests live in the area. Outside of Pokhara, these lamas are usually Gurung village lamas who have often been trained by their father or another local village lama, and have not spent any significant time in a gompa. Some of these lamas, or their ancestors, may once have been traditional Gurung lamas, now referred to by TPLS as 'Bon lamas', but in recent times they have turned to Tibetan Buddhism. These days they are mostly unwilling to work alongside the pachyu, although there are still areas where they do. Most strongly Buddhist Gurungs now call lamas alone. In some cases, informants remember something different from their childhood; in others they say this has been the case for a considerable time. Change has occurred at different rates in different areas. But lamas are not only called by those who identify as Buddhist; many who consider themselves Hindu or do not specifically identify with any one religion will still call a lama at the death of a family member. Christian Gurungs, however, will not.

In Pokhara, where many of my informants come from and where many Gurungs from the surrounding villages have now settled, the issue has become more polarized. A number of Tibetan Buddhist gompas have grown up, some of which train Gurung lamas and teach orthodox Tibetan Buddhism to the lay population (Tamblyn identified nine in 2002, and current estimates put the number at twelve to fifteen). Many residents of Pokhara now hold their funerals and arghauns at Ram Ghat Gompa (the Boudha Arghaun Sadan), with

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Nyingma lamas only officiating, following Buddhist texts and rituals. At the same time, Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh has developed into a major organization with its own building, the Kohimbo, just along the river from Ram Ghat, where their members hold funerals and arghauns with pachyu and klyepri priests.

While in the villages this appears not to be the case, in Pokhara, and possibly even more so in the UK, the division between those who choose to use Buddhist lamas at Ram Ghat and those who use pachyu and klyepri at the Kohimbo, is closely related to clan grouping. Within the Gurung community there are many sub-clans and these form two endogamous clan groups. Much controversy has been caused in the past by researchers referring to these groups as *char jat* and *sorah jat* and suggesting that there is a hierarchy between them and so I am reluctant to repeat the mistake here. Some prefer the terms *songi* and *kugi* as, according to TPLS, these are the indigenous Tamu terms employed before Hindu rule, which introduced the hierarchy, but others object to this distinction also. Certainly, most people from both clan groups now agree that there is no higher and lower, but at the same time there is little intermarriage between them. Those who hold funerals at Ram Ghat are mostly *char jat*; those who use the Kohimbo *sorah jat*.

In the UK, the same pattern is developing. From the examples I have seen (and I have collected details of over 20 funerals since 2009), with one or two exceptions, *sorah jat* use pachyu and klyepri while *char jat* use lamas. That this should be the case must be deeply disappointing to activists and community leaders who have been working hard to promote equality and unity within Gurung society. It is also not reflective of Gurung custom in the not so distant past where there were many *char jat* who used Gurung priests and *sorah jat* who used lamas as well as a large proportion who used both together. With, on the one side, activists pushing for Gurung priests to be recognized as the only truly Gurung religious practitioners and, on the other, Buddhist lamas refusing to work alongside pachyu and klyepri, people are forced to make a choice which previously they would not have had to make. And that choice is increasingly being taken along clan lines.[11]

[11] See Vandenhelsken, Chapter 3 in this volume, on how debates over religious identity, and more particularly about the type of Buddhism Gurungs should be following, have taken shape among Sikkimese Gurungs, within a rather different historical and political context.

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There may be some pressure on families to conform to these expectations and some are uncertain how to proceed. I heard of one case in which the family called pachyu and klyepri to the cremation but then, to satisfy relatives who had tried to persuade them to call a lama, called a lama the following day for a further purifying ritual. The original *khegi* were somewhat offended by this. In another case, the family called pachyu and klyepri but then changed their mind at the last minute and called a lama. Bhim Bahadur (Ghotane) told me his family had always used pachyu and klyepri in the past but when his father dies, and he is now 86, he will face a dilemma. He will have to talk to his father and see what he wants. His wife's family use a Buddhist lama and he was suggesting that this is now the norm, but his village, he said, is still a kind of stronghold of Gurung priests. It is not unusual for family members to disagree on who to employ. I heard of one case in Nepal where the sons of the deceased had called pachyu and klyepri for the funeral but the *buhari* (daughter-in-law) insisted that they use a lama for the arghaun. Once again, there was some bad feeling, as it is generally the case that you should call the same type of priest for the arghaun as for the funeral.

Where a lama is chosen, there is often some dissatisfaction with the ceremony they perform. This is particularly true for the arghaun. The arghaun, as mentioned before, is a Gurung rite not, specifically, a Tibetan Buddhist one. At a lama-led arghaun I attended in the UK, one of the Brigade of Gurkhas' lamas led the ceremony and performed a puja in the name of the deceased. Afterwards there were many complaints from those who attended, because things had been left out or not done according to Gurung tradition. One of the main issues was that the effigy of the deceased, which takes centre stage in a Gurung arghaun as the deceased's soul is placed in it, was put to one side by the lama and the close family members were not instructed to place offerings in front of it during the ritual. The other main complaint was that the *shyai shyai* was left out. This is a practice whereby close family members are given strings around their necks for protection because their loss has made their 'heart small' leaving them vulnerable.[12] It was felt that the sons would not really care,

[12] McHugh (1989: 75–86) writes about the Gurung concept of the *sae* which is similar to the Nepali *man*, usually translated as 'heart or mind' or

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but there was much sympathy for the wife and daughter who, guests worried, might really suffer from this omission. A Gurung lama, who had been assisting in this ritual, explained to me that this kind of dissatisfaction is common these days as "people want it both ways". As he put it, they are Buddhist and want Buddhist rituals, but they also want their cultural traditions. Some people go wholly down the cultural route and do it the TPLS way, the Bon way (he said). Some go wholly Buddhist (Figure 15.1). But many people want both together and this means that they are always dissatisfied.

BLOOD SACRIFICE

For those who choose to use pachyu and klyepri for the arghaun, there are different issues to deal with, and chief among these is the question of sacrifice. Traditionally, the Gurung arghaun requires blood sacrifice, including a sheep and a goat. In the UK this is more than a little hard to manage. It is mainly for this reason that a full pachyu and klyepri-led arghaun is only very rarely performed outside Nepal. Usually TPLS encourages the family to return to Nepal to carry out the arghaun and in fact most Buddhists, who do not usually carry out sacrifice, prefer to do this as well, either because important family members are there or just because the practicalities and expense of organizing one in the UK seem too great. There have, as yet, been very

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'heart-mind'. She writes that "a big *sae* is indicated by a set of qualities that we might call 'expansiveness of spirit'. A person with a big *sae* is resilient, not easily depressed or angered, not upset by small incidents; he or she has an inner equilibrium, manifested as generosity, friendliness, dignity, and evenness of temper, all of which are valued social qualities. A small *sae* involves a tendency to be easily angered or hurt, and is expressed as withdrawal and selfishness, an unwillingness to respond to the demands of others and a reluctance to share, all of which lead to low estimation by others. ... Social setbacks and personal loss cause one's *sae* to shrink. The individual who has suffered humiliation or loss will become chronically vulnerable to sadness and irritability, and will also be more susceptible to witch attack and illness." According to these principles, it is important for the society that people should protect and strengthen those who have suffered a bereavement, so that their heart, or *sae*, does not become small.

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few full three-day arghauns led by pachyu and klyepri performed in the UK.[13] The first of these took place in Woolwich in March 2011. In this case the woman who died had no close family back in Nepal. She was a widow with only one daughter, living in the UK, and they had sold their house in Nepal when they migrated. The deceased's brothers were also in the UK so there was really no possibility of returning to Nepal for the arghaun. It was only under these circumstances that TPLS agreed to do it in England.

The question of sacrifice is a very important one in debates on Gurung cultural and religious identity and these debates are not at all new. Mumford (1989) described how recently migrated Tibetan lamas' condemnation of the practice of animal sacrifice was what set off the Buddhist reform movement in his village of Gyasumdo in the 1960s. Messerschmidt (1976) identified sacrifice as one of the main issues leading to *char jat* Gurungs in his village employing lamas instead of pachyu and klyepri for their death rites in the 1970s. Pettigrew (1995) has described how prominent the issue became in debates on Gurung cultural identity in the 1990s as the Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh established itself in Pokhara and began to push for Gurung shamanism to be recognized as the indigenous religion of the Tamu people and to try to raise its status as a religion on a par with Tibetan Buddhism.

For many of my informants, the inclusion or not of sacrifice is the main distinction between a Gurung priest-led funeral and a lama-led funeral, or even more broadly between Gurung shamanism and Buddhism as a whole: pachyu and klyepri do sacrifice; lamas do not. A number of informants explained the distinction to me in precisely those terms, particularly Pokhara-based Gurungs who have become quite committed to Buddhism. Many of them told me how many Gurungs used to do sacrifice, before they 'knew', but they have since learned that it is wrong to kill. A number of people told me how they had wanted to call pachyu and klyepri for a relative's funeral, but had been uncomfortable about the inclusion of sacrifice. Chitra Bahadur's mother had recently died in Nepal and he had gone back to arrange

[13] These represent the only arghauns arranged by TPLS in the UK as the organization does not support the performance of a shortened version of the ritual. Nor had they, at the time of fieldwork, carried out any other arghauns in other parts of the diaspora.

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the arghaun. He had wanted to invite pachyu and klyepri but did not want them to perform sacrifice. If they killed a sheep, he explained, that would be a sin, so bad for him and his mother. But the pachyu and klyepri would not come if they could not do sacrifice. In the end a lama conducted the ceremony reading a Buddhist text in Tibetan.

For many Gurungs living in other areas of Nepal (outside Pokhara) the distinction is not so stark. There are pachyu and klyepri who are willing to carry out their rituals without sacrifice, in response to popular demand (Pettigrew 1995: 161–6). At the same time, there are a few pockets where local Gurung lamas are still prepared to work alongside pachyu performing sacrifice or even to include sacrifice in death rituals which they perform on their own, which Mumford (1989), noted had been a common occurrence in Gyasumdo in the 1960s before the Buddhist reform. Dil Kumari lost her father in the UK, but returned to Nepal for the arghaun. In her village, she told me, they have always used a lama, but they still perform sacrifice. The main sacrifice in an arghaun takes place on the second day. On the first day the souls of the deceased are called, and enticed back to the house. On the second day, the deceased's soul is transferred into a sheep and then fed. It is offered all sorts of foods that sheep do not normally eat—meat, liquor (*raksi*), cigarettes—and the sheep always chooses the favourite foods of the deceased. When the sheep is killed, these foods are not found in its stomach, offering proof to observers that they were really consumed by the deceased. The sheep also indicates if he is unhappy. If any important family member is missing, he cries out and may go looking for them, and when he is satisfied, he indicates this by shaking. Dil Kumari told me that it is only through this practice that you can know how the deceased is feeling, whether he is content or there is something that he still needs.

The sharing of meat from the sacrificed animal is also an important part of the funeral and one of the social obligations of the deceased's family. Phul Maya, now 61, remembers a time in her childhood when sacrifice used to be included in the rituals presided over by the lama in her village, but also remembers a big debate over the issue when she was about 13 or 14. Two lamas had been called for the funeral of a relative on her father's side. The usual village lama wanted to include sacrifice but the other, an outsider who had been called because he was related to the deceased, refused. The villagers all wanted the

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sacrifice to go ahead, because they liked to eat meat. Messerschmidt (1976: 129–30) describes a similar situation in the village he studied. The *char jat* Gurungs wanted to follow the lamas and renounce sacrifice, but found the prospect of a meatless funerary feast unthinkable. For them it was a matter of honour to feed meat to their guests (cf. Adhikari and Gellner 2016a). They felt compelled to kill a sheep out of sight of the lama even while they publicly condemned ritual killing. The lamas themselves later consented to the non-religious killing of animals for the final funerary feast and even joined in the consumption. In Phul Maya's case, whether due to Buddhist principles or family loyalties, they chose to set aside those social obligations and support the lama who was against sacrifice, but the villagers then refused to attend. In the end, they held a feast after the ritual was complete, with meat purchased from the market, which satisfied everyone. Nowadays, all of the villagers, including the village lama, have given up the performance of blood sacrifice, but, like the villagers of Messerschmidt's study, they agreed that it was acceptable to consume meat at the final feast provided the animal had not been killed as part of the ritual.

In other areas, as noted above, pachyu and klyepri will agree to perform their rituals without sacrifice, but this is controversial. For some priests, sacrifice is essential, and rites ineffective without it, while others will happily omit it, if requested. Pettigrew (1995) has described how many of the shamans of Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh are concerned that the discourse on sacrifice is threatening their own traditions. As shamans are persuaded to give up sacrifice, they may be both altering traditions that TPLS are working hard to preserve and, more seriously, putting at risk the relationship between the shamans and the spirit world that it is their responsibility to maintain for the protection of all. TPLS leaders in the UK continue to be concerned by this issue and talk of conducting some research on the role of sacrifice in Gurung ritual. By consulting the *pe*, the oral texts of the pachyu and klyepri, they hope to establish whether or not, and why, blood sacrifice is necessary. However, the problem, which they freely admit, is that even the *khegi* themselves are not all fluent in the ancient language of the *pe*. Some can recite the texts without understanding the meaning of every part so there are few who can reliably offer, or challenge, interpretations. The plan in the long term, as part of the project of

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collecting and transcribing the texts of a wide range of *khegi*, will be to produce a dictionary of *Cho Kyui* (ancient Gurung language) so that future generations will be able to interpret the *pe* for themselves and find answers to such questions.

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When it comes to providing for family members at death, Gurungs are making progress in getting around practical obstacles, learning how to negotiate UK bureaucracy, and organizing themselves, so that they can share knowledge and resources. Individuals and organizations have gained confidence in navigating the UK system and are aware of where they can turn for help outside the community as well as within. The growth of the population has led to an increase in the number of religious specialists available, both Buddhist lamas and Gurung pachyu and klyepri, most of whom are now relatively experienced in conducting funerals in the UK and have developed means of adapting and modifying the necessary rituals to fit the resources and facilities available. Gurung laymen are, for the most part, prepared to defer to the expertise of these specialists and as most have now attended one or several Gurung funerals in the UK and are thus familiar with the usual procedure, few now feel the need to return to Nepal to carry out these initial funerary rites.

At the same time, it is partly through attendance at these large funeral gatherings that belonging is enabled amongst the Gurung community in the UK and beyond, and a Gurung world, or Tamu *yul*, extended beyond its traditional boundaries. Attendance at a Gurung funeral may be a way to see and be seen, to demonstrate a general loyalty and respect towards fellow Gurungs and other Nepalis in the UK. However, attendance patterns show that funeral gatherings also strengthen particular communities, and reaffirm and re-establish the social and blood ties, the bonds of kin, village, and clan, which are perhaps the most important aspects of belonging within the Gurung social world. Through the efforts made to fulfil obligations to village and kin through attendance at their funerals, and by the emphasis placed on those relationships in the ceremonies themselves, village and family connections can be reaffirmed and re-established: made to matter in a context where they could easily be neglected and forgotten.

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While Gurung funerals are now a common occurrence in the UK, however, most still choose to return to Nepal for the arghaun, suggesting perhaps that a Tamu *yul* in the full sense described by Des Chene (1992: 2–3)—a "place of belonging, relatedness and ancestry ... and, as a sacred space, ... the place in which Gurung cosmological beliefs prevail"—has not yet been fully established. Few pachyu and klyepri-led arghauns have taken place in the UK and, while the shorter lama-led arghauns are more common, many still choose to return to Nepal. One important reason why this is so for those who opt for pachyu and klyepri at death is the difficulty of performing sacrifice in the UK and this continues to be an important issue for some. While in many quarters Gurungs have been able to drop sacrifice with little regret, some are still convinced that the rituals cannot be efficacious without it, and for others it stands as a powerful symbol that Gurung traditions are not Buddhist and thus it has an equally important symbolic significance. Certainly, the long-running debates that continue to rage over the place of Buddhism in Gurung culture have been transported, and even augmented, in the UK and show no signs of abating. This debate itself can only be detrimental to the strengthening of a sense of belonging to the broader Gurung community, a fact of which Gurung leaders, with their ongoing efforts to achieve Gurung unity, are well aware (Gurung 2015). Furthermore, in the UK, Gurungs may be forced to engage with this debate and align themselves with one side or the other, particularly at death, where they cannot fall back on village convention but must choose to follow either a Buddhist lama or the priests of the TPLS and may feel pressured to make that decision on the basis of clan membership rather than ritual preference.

While these pressures may have a bearing on the choices and behaviour of many, even those who have a strong and unambiguous commitment to Buddhism and have given up sacrifice, mostly prefer to complete the post-funerary rites in Nepal. With the opening of the new Buddhist Community Centre gompa in Aldershot this may change and it is likely that more will choose to hold their arghauns there. But the decision to return to Nepal need not be read as an indication of a lack of belonging in the UK. Most explain such a decision with reference to the lack of leisure time to organize such an event in the UK and also to the absence of relatives and these factors are

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unlikely to change even as they become more settled. Arghauns can be, and frequently are, held a considerable time after death and the arghauns of two or more relatives can be combined in one ceremony.

As most migrants maintain relationships with relatives and friends in their place of origin and elsewhere in the diaspora, it may not seem necessary or desirable to hold the arghaun in the UK where important connections within the wider transnational community will not be able to take part. As most scholars of transnationalism will assert, it is quite possible, and even usual, for migrants to belong in two or more locations at once. Furthermore, given that the Gurung community in the UK is so young and that those who have died here have migrated only in old age, it is of little surprise that these older connections remain of primary importance. It has yet to be seen how the next generation, who will have spent most of their adult lives in the UK, will deal with the same questions.[14]

14 I thank the AHRC for the doctoral studentship which enabled me to do fieldwork in Farnborough between 2010 and 2012. This formed part of the AHRC-supported Vernacular Religion project [AH/HO15876/1].

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16

THE MIGRATION OF NEPALI NURSES TO THE UK

TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY TIES, SOCIAL RITUAL, AND THE ROLE OF INTERNET TECHNOLOGY

Radha Adhikari

SINCE 2000, OVER ONE THOUSAND Nepali nurses—almost all of them female—from all walks of life with various levels of work experience, and a wide range of religious and cultural backgrounds, have migrated to the UK. When these nurses made their initial journey, the vast majority had to come on their own, leaving behind their husband and children, if they had them. Nurses were able to invite their immediate family to join them only after they became fairly settled in the UK. With a full-time permanent job, modest income, and the need to acquire family accommodation, this usually takes between one and two years. Almost all Nepali migrant nurses had to go through a period of family separation after migration.

In recent years, not only has the number of Nepalis leaving the country for international jobs and education increased, but also the number of migration destinations has expanded. Nepali nurses'

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family and friends have also migrated to the UK and various other destinations, such as North America, Australia, and New Zealand. In this chapter, I discuss how UK-based Nepali nurses and their families maintain family and friendship ties and socio-cultural connections with Nepal and internationally, with particular reference to the use of the internet and other modes of digital communication technology.

RESHAM FIRIRI IN LONDON: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC MOMENT

It was early February 2007, and I was in the early days of my project researching the migration experiences of Nepali nurses and their social and professional life in the UK. I had just established some links with Nepali nurses (and their families) in the UK. I had travelled to London to meet and interview three nurses there, with my first point of contact being Sumi.[1] As arranged, I travelled to London from Edinburgh to meet Sumi in Wembley where she was living. I arrived around half past ten in the morning and had planned to spend the whole day with her. It was Sumi's day off from work and her husband was out working. She answered the door bell and took me upstairs to her room.

Sumi and her husband had rented a room in a semi-detached, suburban house near the underground tube station in Wembley. Her landlord too was originally from South Asia, she informed me. Her medium-sized bedroom was on the first floor, decorated with Nepali paraphernalia: items such as Nepali khukuris (the famous curved knife), the Nepali flag, Nepali photo frames, Nepali calendars, and other items were on display in her room. For a moment, I felt like I was in Nepal. We introduced ourselves. Sumi was very welcoming and suggested I sit anywhere and make myself comfortable. We sat on her bed. She gave me a brief account of her professional life and career in Nepal and her experience in London (I also told her briefly about myself).

Sumi had been living and working in London since 2005. She came to London on her own at first and her husband joined her sixteen months later. We spent about an hour just chatting about

[1] All names are pseudonyms.

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nursing and Nepal, and quickly discovered that we had some mutual friends. Sumi wanted to show me her photo album, which included photos of her family as well as some of our mutual friends. As she opened her wardrobe to get her album out, there was a landslide of Waiwai noodle packets. She had piled up a couple of dozen of these noodle packets inside her wardrobe and she told me that they were from Nepal.

Sumi had arranged to introduce me to one of her Nepali friends, Kusum, who lived nearby. Sumi had planned to invite Kusum over for lunch with us. She phoned Kusum and cooked some pasta; she had already made some Nepali-style *achar* (sauce). Kusum came with her son and we had our lunch at around one in the afternoon. Both nurses' husbands joined us later in the afternoon. I interviewed Sumi and Kusum that afternoon, each interview lasting for an hour. While I was with Sumi and Kusum on that day, both of their mobile phones rang many times. The phones rang while we were chatting; they rang while we were cooking, and rang again when we were eating, and again during our interviews. We were interrupted numerous times by the phone calls. What struck me most (at that time) was the ring tones of their mobile phones. Sumi's mobile ringtone was a Nepali folk tune (*resham firiri resham firiri udera jau ki dandama bhanjang resham firiri*) and Kusum had Bollywood film music. After about five in the afternoon, Kusum and her family left, I stayed with Sumi and her husband a bit longer.

In the evening, just before I left, Sumi and her husband started a Skype chat with their family in Nepal. I was introduced to their family. It was my first observation of a Nepali nurse using a mobile phone and the internet to stay connected with their friends and family in Nepal. The ring tone, the frequent and regular use of the internet, and indeed the broader networks Nepali nurses had in the UK, I found truly amazing, as I myself had not yet started to use Skype to communicate with my family in Nepal. But within a month of my research fieldwork, it all began to seem completely normal.

I met and interacted with over 150 Nepali nurses, and some of their family members and friends, all over the UK. It became a common occurrence during interviews and meetings to be interrupted by the mobile phone and Skype chats. Some interviews had several interruptions; some phone calls were made from nurses' families in Nepal

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and others were from friends in the UK and internationally. Gradually I learned that most of the nurses and their families had developed a routine to Skype chat with family and friends. When nurses and their family were not at work, they would normally be online. Many nurses' families in Nepal knew the nurses' daily work schedule so they could time the Skype chat or mobile call accordingly. If, for any reason, the nurses were not found to be online, their family and friends would phone them and request them to go online so that they could chat for longer (at that time Skype chat was free and mobile phone calls were not; but in the past few years with a new mobile software called Viber—which can be downloaded into most smartphones—international calls are increasingly also becoming free). As I began to learn more about their routine use of communication technologies, I started noticing more of their communication activities. Although, while designing my doctoral research, I had not given any thought to the ways nurses communicate in Britain or to the significance of mobile phones and internet technology, I soon realised that phones and the internet played a major part in Nepali nurses' social lives. I realised too that the nurses took care that the communication technologies they used, whether for long-distance or local contacts, were immediate and up-to-date. I also found myself drawn into the social networks of some of the nurses' families and friends in Nepal and internationally.

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter is based on my doctoral research, which looked at the nursing education system in Nepal and Nepali nurse migration to the UK. The research was multi-sited and fieldwork was done in Nepal and in the UK, between July 2006 and December 2008 with follow-ups in 2009. In Nepal, I studied the socio-cultural context for women's/nurses' migration with a particular focus on how young women were trained to become nurses and how they prepared for their international move. There I met and interacted with over one hundred nursing students. I visited 20 nursing colleges and interviewed senior nurse managers, campus chiefs, and nurse teachers. I also explored how nurse migration was facilitated by brokering agencies. As mentioned above, I met over 150 Nepali migrant nurses who were

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living and working in the UK and conducted 22 in-depth interviews. As well as nurses, I spent a considerable amount of time with nurses' husbands and other family members. In both countries, I met research informants in both everyday and institutional "natural settings" (Brewer 2000; Gellner and Hirsch 2001; Ritchie and Lewis 2003). I personally gathered all the research information, using multiple research techniques including observation, in-depth interviews, and—where appropriate—focus-group discussions. In addition, I had numerous informal discussions, countless telephone conversations, and multiple meetings, email, and Facebook exchanges with nurses and their families. I also reviewed available relevant records and policy documents around international nurse migration.

MIGRATION AND MEDIA

Communication technology and popular media plays a vital role in human mobility and life in any diaspora. First, various forms of media, such as television, films, photographic images, and print media inspire people to migrate as they provide prospective migrants much-needed information about life in their chosen destination. Second, media also help migrants to form social networks, exchange information and ideas of the host society, gain access to social capital, settle in a new society, and, most importantly, to stay connected with their family and home community.[2] Available communication and information media have long been used by migrants, migration policymakers, and other stakeholders, including migrant nurses and their families and friends (Choy 2003; King and Wood 2001; Madianou 2012). Before the internet, and when the VCR technology became available, they would send video messages via friends and relatives; before that messages were recorded on cassette tapes and posted or sent with friends or relatives.

Most recently, the widespread availability of internet technology and cheap mobile phone calls has given a new twist to modern-day migration and the diaspora experience. Unlike in the past (pre-internet

[2] At the same time, media also transmits negative images of immigrants by portraying them as 'bogus', and a burden to the host society (Chavez 2001; King and Wood 2001).

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and mobile phone times), modern images from distant locations are transmitted globally within a few seconds via the internet and mobile phones. International jobs are increasingly advertised on the world-wide web. The increased flow of information globally, along with cheap and faster travel facilities, has facilitated human mobility to a wider range of destinations. New communication media have helped people create "virtual neighborhoods" (Appadurai 1996: 194f). We can be living and working anywhere in the world, but with access to the internet and mobile phone facilities, we can remain in touch with family and friends anytime. Amongst many other functions, modern-day media help migrants to maintain their cultural identity as well as to continue their links with their family and kin in the source community (King and Wood 2001; Lan 2006; Madianou 2012). The worldwide web and more sophisticated mobile phone technology have become increasingly popular and widely used by most global migrants in the twenty-first century, including migrant Nepali nurses and their families in Nepal, the UK, and internationally. However, migration and media scholars suggest that until recently there has been very little scholarly interest in looking at the role of media in human migration as an interconnected subject (King and Wood 2001).

In the particular context of Nepal, international migration is not new, but the widespread availability of mobile phone and internet communication is new, and this has certainly coincided with the phenomenon of international nurse migration. As noted above, the international migration of Nepali nurses began roughly around the new millennium. It is estimated that between 2000 and 2008, around 3,000 fully trained Nepali nurses migrated to developed countries, with the most desired destinations being the USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Approximately 1,000 have come to the UK (Adhikari, R. 2011).[3] In this chapter, I focus on these two areas: Nepali nurse migration to the UK, and their use of modern communication technology, particularly internet and mobile communication technologies. These mobile communication technologies have become the close companions of migrant nurses in their migration journey to, and diasporic life in, the UK.

[3] The vast majority of nurses who came to the UK have found jobs in private-sector nursing homes.

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NURSING IN NEPAL AND INTERNATIONAL NURSE MIGRATION

Nursing as a professional education in Nepal began only in the mid-1950s. Initially, it was not considered respectable for young women to move away from the family home and take a job elsewhere. Nursing was therefore not considered an attractive profession. It took over three decades for the profession to gain full social acceptance. Only after the establishment of multi-party democracy in the 1990s did nursing become an increasingly attractive female profession (Adhikari, R. 2008, 2010, 2011). Evidently nurse training programmes started to receive increasing numbers of applicants. Many new nurse education programmes were set up to cater for the growing demand for training places. For example, the number of staff nurse education programmes grew from just six in 1996 (training around 250 nurses per year), to over three dozen in 2006, and then to 103 (each training between 20 and 60 nurses per year) in 2010 (about half located in the Kathmandu Valley, the remainder in west, central, and east Nepal, with only two in the Far West). While exact figures are not available, my interviews and data-gathering in September 2010 support the estimate that over 2,000 nurses are trained annually in Nepal. The increasing attraction of nursing as a career coincided with the massive expansion in scope and scale of media production in Nepal. There has been a rapid growth in the number of media production sites such as FM radio, newspapers, and television channels in the years since 1990; and the internet and mobile phones did not exist before 1990 at all (Liechty 2003; Onta et al. 2005).

The trend of nurse migration from Nepal to the UK began roughly in 1999–2000 when the UK healthcare system was experiencing an acute nursing shortage. After the Labour Party election victory in late 1997, nursing shortages in the UK became a major political issue. A political commitment to recruit 20,000 more nurses by 2004 was made and NHS employers were under immense pressure to recruit nurses quickly to enable them to reduce hospital waiting lists (Kingma 2006). The news of a nursing shortage in the UK was spread nationally and internationally. As well as international advertisements, the British National Health Service employers travelled abroad and actively recruited nurses from the Philippines, India, and a number of African countries, as well as from Spain (Plotnikova

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2012). British nursing jobs were advertised on the worldwide web and this news spread rapidly to nurses and their families in Nepal. As such, internet technology and popular media have played a crucial role in making British jobs attractive to foreign nurses and in encouraging international nurse migration from Nepal.

As well as the internet and other communication media, as Liechty suggests "... each of these Nepalis living abroad provides a window onto another cultural world for their family members and friends back home" (2003: 51). A small Nepali diaspora network in the UK at that time utilized modern communication technology to provide further information on nursing vacancies and a possible life for professional nurses in the UK. A few Nepali nurses, who had family and friendship connections, had come to the UK. After they were settled in the UK working environment, they themselves started providing links to their friends back in Nepal.

As a result of widespread popular media advertisements and increasing diaspora links, UK nursing vacancies suddenly appeared as a glamorous opportunity for Nepali nurses. Images of better working conditions in the UK and opportunities to work in modern high-tech hospitals and the potential for better earnings were transmitted by newspapers, magazines, the internet, and also mobile phone networks. The number of Nepali nurses leaving for UK jobs started to rise. By the end of 2008, over one thousand Nepali nurses had migrated to the UK. National and international television, film, and other visual media play an important role in spreading global images. When I asked a Nepali nurse why she had chosen to come to the UK, her response was, "I had this imagination that the UK was a 'classical place, with a preserved culture', which I had seen in old English films [in Nepal]. I wanted to come and see it and be in it."[4]

The establishment of Nepal's television network in the mid-1980s coincided with increased international migration from Nepal. In Nepal the UK's NHS has the image of being modern and technologically advanced, and one of the best healthcare systems in the world, and the UK is seen as a country with opportunities for better earnings,

4 We were speaking Nepali, but the phrase 'classical place, with a preserved culture' was in English.

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better educational opportunities, and overall higher living standards.[5] As a consequence, nurses, doctors, other types of healthcare professional, and other categories of high-skilled professionals, including students of higher education, aspire to work, live, and study in the UK. Nepali nurses come to the UK with high aspirations and expectations to work in a modern and technologically advanced healthcare system and hope to further their nursing careers, as well as providing education opportunities for their families and kin (Adhikari, R. 2011).

Kiran, a Nepali nurse I interviewed in south-east England, commented:

> ... here she [a friend of hers] used to send us photos, always looking very pleasant and happy. She only sent happy-looking photos ... [She giggles]. She used to stay in Lewisham in London. Quite a lot of Nepalis still live there. She sent us photos of Teej, Dasain, Tihar [major Nepali Hindu festivals]. And she lived near her family and relations, so photos with her *didi-bahini* [older and younger sisters] and *daju-bhai* [older and younger brothers]. All looking happy, always on holidays, like they never knew about any difficulty. So I had prepared myself and aspired for that kind of life. Their photos of wearing saris and so much golden jewellery like that, it all looked very nice ...

She was remembering a pre-internet period when friends sent photographic images from the UK by post. Now with Facebook and Skype, photos and other images are transmitted instantly. She too uses Skype and Facebook almost every day. What has not changed is that the photos do not depict the gritty reality of work, the hardships and disappointments involved in migration to another country.

NEPALI NURSES IN THE UK AND THE USE OF MOBILES AND THE INTERNET

Nepali nurses I met during the research were from diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-cultural backgrounds.[6] Out of 22 participants

[5] There was a decade-long civil war (1996–2006) at the time these nurses left Nepal, but during the interviews no nurse mentioned the war as a push factor leading them to migrate to the UK.

[6] Recognizing the emerging ethnic and religious tension in Nepal, I consciously decided not to ask questions that touched on nurses' ethnicity, or on

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in the in-depth interviews, seventeen were married and some had young children back in Nepal. Some had their family already with them in the UK. The remaining five were single. However, like most foreign nurses in the UK, the majority of Nepali nurses initially had to come by themselves, because of visa regulations. Their family members were only able to join them later, a pattern that migration scholars describe as chain migration (Ahmed 2005; Castles 2000). In their early days in the UK, migrant Nepali nurses utilized existing Nepali diaspora networks via the internet and mobile phone, as noted above. They created and joined one of Appadurai's (1996: 197–8) "virtual neighborhoods", in other words, a virtual community and support network.

In the early days after relocation to the UK, nurses, particularly those who were living and working in rural areas outside London with no other Nepali friends nearby, found it a very lonely and isolating experience. Mobile phone and Skype chat made an enormous difference and enabled them to stay connected with their families and friends in Nepal, and globally. A nurse I interviewed in Scotland, who came to the UK on her own leaving her husband behind, said, "I used to phone him [her husband] and still do every day, I used so much money on the phone, it was quite expensive initially ... it is hard to live like this, but we have no choice, I have to have a work permit visa first then I can invite him over. We are in the process now."

After arriving in London on her own in 2004, Maya was sent to a village in the north of England where she completed her adaptation training.[7] When I met her in May 2007, she had been living in that

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socio-cultural and religious life. However, as I spent so much time with them and their families in the UK, I had the opportunity to understand how diaspora nurses socialize in the UK and form and join social support networks, how they maintain cultural and religious practices, and how they participate in such practices both in Nepal and internationally.

7 This is a short-term conversion course for overseas-trained nurses under supervision. Upon satisfactory completion, the supervisor will recommend full registration with the NMC, so nurses can become fully licensed practitioners in the UK.

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village for almost three years; for the first two years she was on her own and in the third year her family joined her:

> ... I used to work usually six to seven days a week initially, sometimes long days ... and after the shift I had no social life. I would work in a nursing home, come home after the shift, then nothing, no family here and no friends nearby. I missed my family desperately. I lived on my own for two full years, and I lost so much weight, I was getting much thinner ... I went to Newcastle a few times to meet up with other Nepalis. My family joined me a year ago, it is better for me now.

Maya said that mobile phone and Skype became her close companions during this period of family separation.

Usha, who was based in south-east England and had left her two children with her husband in Nepal, stated, "... I speak to them [husband and children] regularly, almost every day or every other day. I miss them so much, I tell my husband to look after them [the children] ... *mitho-mitho khanekura dinus bhanchhu* (I tell him to give them the tasty food they like to eat). Hopefully it won't be long before they can come here."

Usha's children and husband joined her in the summer of 2009. A few months later Usha obtained a permanent job in a small village in Scotland and they all moved up north together. Like Usha, many other Nepali nurses I interviewed, who had left their children behind, were providing "long-distance mothering" (Ehrenreich and Russell-Hochschild 2002; Lan 2006; Madianou 2012; Parrenas 2005; Zimmerman, Litt, and Bose 2006). Migrant nurses constantly live in a transnational world or between two worlds, physically in Britain and emotionally trying to reconnect with their loved ones in Nepal. Internet technology and mobile phone networks have been a major asset for transnational family life (Madianou 2012).

Another nurse I met in a small town in Scotland, who was living on her own but socializing virtually with friends in many parts of the world, said:

> ... My close friend is here. Now, here [in the UK] ... the person who just phoned me a few minutes ago, [she had received several phone calls during this interview] she is one of my best friends, from the hostel, my roommate [from nurse training time], some are here, one is in America, and we do have regular chats [using phone and also online Skype chat] ...

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> I sleep a lot, sleep until about 10-11 in the morning, when I am not working. I invite my *dai, didi* and friends, whoever is there and is free to come on line [in Nepal] when I am free here [in Scotland] to chat online.

As international migration diversifies, many Nepalis who currently live in the UK have family and friends living in many different parts in the world. Nurses I met in the UK had family, relatives, and friends in Australia, New Zealand, North America, and other parts of the world. One element almost all of the nurses had in common was the use of Skype, mobile phone, and instant messaging.

INTERNET MEDIA AND THE MAINTENANCE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL RITUAL AND FAMILY TIES

Not only has internet technology and other communication media been very useful for migrant nurses and their families and friends to stay connected, form and join 'virtual communities', and provide 'long-distance mothering care', but once they are settled in the UK, these media have been very useful to maintain their socio-cultural rituals. I present Chanda's case study as it illustrates how Nepali Hindu rituals can be observed and practised simultaneously in Kathmandu and in the UK. This has only been possible thanks to the connectivity of the internet.

Chanda is a Nepali nurse who has been working in Scotland since spring 2007. Like many other migrant Nepali nurses, Chanda came to the UK in 2006 on her own, leaving her family behind. She was from a middle-class background and educated in a private school. She got married only a few months before she came to the UK. She had some other family members and relatives in Australia and New Zealand. Chanda used Skype and mobile phones to stay connected with her husband, family, and friends in Kathmandu, Australia, and New Zealand.

Chanda's husband, Maheshowar, joined her in 2008. They had their first child in the autumn of 2009. Here I present a short description to illustrate how the internet mediated the Hindu ritual practice that Chanda and her family observed in Edinburgh for their son's *nwaran* (naming) and *pasni* (weaning or first rice-feeding) ceremonies.

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The naming ceremony normally takes place on the eleventh day after a baby's birth and *pasni* at five to six months of age. Birth and death are unclean periods for most Hindus. The naming ceremony is conducted not only to name a new born baby but also to clean and purify the family's unclean status, so it cannot be omitted.

On the eleventh day after the birth of Chanda's baby, they held a naming ceremony very comparable to what would have happened in Kathmandu. For this ritual, three Brahmin priests and guests were invited to the family home in Kathmandu and a few guests were invited to their flat in Edinburgh. A ritual *mandap* (a temporary porch-like structure created for worshipping and performing Hindu religious rituals) was set up in their family home in Kathmandu and the three priests conducted the rituals there. The whole ceremony was planned this way because the family were aware that their family priest would not be available in Edinburgh to perform this ritual properly.

At the Edinburgh end the baby was put in front of a computer and webcam. While the priests were performing the ritual and chanting mantras (Hindu religious verses) in Kathmandu, they simultaneously gave instructions to Maheshowar and Chanda in Edinburgh and Maheshowar's family in Kathmandu. The ceremony took a couple of hours, with Chanda and her husband following every step very closely. The baby's grandparents were present in Edinburgh supporting Maheshowar and Chanda during the ceremony. The priests saw the baby on the computer screen, as needed for the ceremony, and gave the baby his name, touching the baby's forehead on the screen with gold-dipped and blessed water. After the ceremony was complete, everybody in the family received a *tika* on the forehead (on such occasions the *tika* is an elaborate rice, yogurt, and red vermilion mixture, applied to the forehead) by the baby's grandfather in Edinburgh and the senior priest in Kathmandu. The ritual was followed by feasts, in Kathmandu and Edinburgh.

Six months later, Chanda and Maheshowar held their baby's feeding ceremony in a similar fashion. Again a big feast was prepared for all the guests to celebrate in Kathmandu as well as in Edinburgh. When the boy reached two years of age, once again they held the ritual in Edinburgh and received instructions on how to perform it from Nepal via Skype (Figure 16.1).

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Figure 16.1 Maheshowar and his son in Edinburgh receive ritual instructions via Skype, from their priest in Kathmandu, on how to perform the boy's first haircutting.

Source: C. Adhikari (26 February 2012).

This case is not an isolated occurrence. Many people have informed me that this way of observing rituals is becoming increasingly common for Nepalis globally and I have been present at similar occasions or seen them reported on the internet.

It is not only children's life-cycle events but important festivals and religious observances that are observed and connected, thanks to the internet. In January (corresponding to the Nepali month of Magh), many Nepalis in the UK and elsewhere observe the month-long fast and religious observance of the goddess Swasthani. Each day they listen to one chapter of the story on Youtube and use Skype to join their families in Nepal in a very similar fashion as Chanda and Maheshowar held their transnational *nwaran* and *pasni* ceremonies. There are many Youtube links that provide the holy verses; members of the Nepali diaspora visit these websites, exchange links via Facebook, and follow the verses during the Swasthani season.

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MIGRANTS' SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND COSMOPOLITANISM IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

Migrants and their social integration into the host society has been one of the most widely discussed issues by migration study scholars (Castles 2000; Winkelmann-Gleed 2006). Fog-Olwig (2007: 8) comments that migration researchers have focused on the receiving country context and on "... the causes and patterns of migration flow that shape the influx of people, the process of incorporation whereby the newly arrived are turned into proper citizens." Converting the migrant into a proper citizen, who fits well into the host society, has been a major policy concern for host countries and societies for several decades (Castles 2000).

Discussing migrants' social integration, Harper (2011) has suggested that migrants, particularly those from low-income countries like Nepal, integrate better than for example Western aid workers in the context of Nepal. Foreign aid workers in Nepal live and work within a closed community in a 'self-created comfort zone', whereas migrant Nepalis in Western developed countries are forced, by circumstances, to learn English and other local languages and to follow everyday social practices in the host society. In fact, however, the internet and modern communication technologies have enabled Nepali migrant nurses and their families to generate a similar 'comfort zone' in the UK, and the Nepali diaspora abroad are not as cosmopolitan as might be thought. Here I present an example of a Nepali nurse called Tara's experience of social life in the UK:

> When I first arrived I went to Eastbourne, there I spent so much time with other Asians, and it did not feel like Britain at all, I did not get any chance to learn about social life in Britain. Then I moved here [to Scotland]. Here too I don't socialize with the locals or work colleagues, I don't interact with them. I am not like that, sometimes they invite me for a night out, and I don't go ... if you don't go once or twice, they would not invite you again. I am not that kind of person ... I got invited out a few times but I did not go, so they don't invite me again ... I go out with work colleagues only for work-related stuff, that is all. I have no personal relationships.

Tara later told me that when she is free she invites her family/friends to come online in Nepal (and elsewhere) and she spends

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hours chatting with them on Skype and Facebook. In addition, it is not only the nurses but also their children who spend considerable amounts of time chatting online with their Nepali friends in Nepal and globally.

It is commonly assumed that when people are exposed to the outside world, by moving away from home (or if the world comes closer to home with the help of internet media and other communication technology), they become more cosmopolitan. Their understanding of the wider world increases. Rajak and Stirrat (2011) describe how people, who work in the development industry as expatriates, away from home, moving between countries and in different continents, consider themselves as more cosmopolitan than their colleagues who stay in their home countries. They point out, however, that though such development experts and foreign aid workers may indeed be more outward-looking, they do not actually get fully engaged with the local people in the host society. They prefer to socialize with other expatriates from other parts of the world. They too create and live in their own 'comfort zone'. Rajak and Stirrat (2011) further suggest that this is perhaps a new type of 'cosmopolitanism', which they dub parochial cosmopolitanism. Hausner (2011) suggests that members of the Nepali diaspora in the UK, coming from diverse ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds, celebrate major festivals and other communal events collectively, thereby creating their own cosmopolitan world. With the use of internet technology and easy access to growing diaspora network in the UK, I found Nepali nurses in a very similar situation. They also seem to be living in a parochial cosmopolitan society.

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In this chapter I have illustrated how the new media, particularly internet and mobile technology, have played a major role in Nepali nurse migration and their diaspora experiences in the UK. Modern communication technology has not only become one of the vital sources of information needed for migration, but has become a major travel and social companion for Nepali nurses and their families. Internet and mobile phone facilities have helped nurses stay connected with their nearest and dearest in Nepal and internationally.

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The internet and mobile technology have also provided a 'comfort zone' for diasporic Nepalis in the UK and globally.

Similarly, in recent years, because of the widespread use of new media and communication technology, Nepali nurses and their families in diaspora belong to a new and peculiar or parochial type of cosmopolitan culture in the UK (or other host society). They use internet communication media and networks to 'socialize virtually', and to 'provide long-distance mothering care'. They are now able to listen to Nepali folk music and watch (or catch up on) popular television programmes in Hindi and Nepali, maintain family rituals using the internet, and thus inhabit a 'parochial cosmopolitan' world. Technology makes transnational lives possible and comfortable, provides home comforts (and also perhaps nostalgia for home) while living in diaspora. As a consequence, there is less of a need for migrants to socialize with their next-door neighbours and work colleagues. All those who have access to these media can now access family and friends in Nepal and globally at any time and from anywhere in the world. Migration does not lead to a 'disconnect' from the homeland, instead these nurses appear to be very much connected with the homeland.

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CASTE DISCRIMINATION OVERSEAS

NEPALI DALITS IN ENGLAND

Mitra Pariyar

ONE MAY MORNING IN 2013 an elderly Gurkha and his wife (who happened to be Dalits) invited me for lunch at their little rented flat in Farnborough, Hampshire, England. Over a meal of rice and chicken curry they shared their experiences of living in the UK for the past two years. They were among the older veterans who had emigrated from Nepal to Britain in thousands, when a popular Gurkha campaign fronted by actress Joanna Lumley was successful in 2009 in winning the right for all ex-Gurkhas with at least four years' service to settle in the UK (Ware 2012).[1] Five years earlier, in May 2004, younger

[1] Although the term 'Gurkha' is used by some as synonymous with Nepali (cf. the discussion in Chapter 13 in this volume), in this chapter I follow the more widely accepted usage according to which it refers to Nepali men who have served in the Brigade of Gurkhas of the British Army. Despite serving the British for two centuries, most Gurkhas and their families experience the UK as an alien country. They were mostly deployed in overseas bases such as Malaya, Hong Kong, and Brunei. Only post-1997 ex-servicemen spent significant amounts of time in Britain while in service.

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retirees, that is, those serving after July 1997 (when the headquarters of the Brigade of Gurkhas shifted from Hong Kong to Britain), had been given permission to settle in Britain. At that time a few older retired Gurkhas also managed to travel to the UK and apply for the immigration visa called 'indefinite leave to remain' (ILR). Whether they arrived before or after the 2009 victory, this post-2004 migration was of a different order from anything that had happened before. Following the sudden arrival of these new immigrants, it was claimed that in the towns of Aldershot and Farnborough Nepalis made up approximately 10 per cent of the local population.[2] The census data, however, revealed the figure for 2013 to be 6.5 per cent (Adhikari 2013a: 22–8; cf. p. 317 above). In any case, this was a big rise in the migrant population of the town, which generated considerable anger and frustration among local White residents.

I had therefore expected the Dalit couple to tell me their stories of being troubled by White people on the streets, as was the common experience of other Nepalis. They did indeed suffer some prejudice at the hands of local residents, but, ironically, they felt more threatened by other Nepalis! As low-caste Tailors, they had been constantly denigrated as untouchable Damais on the streets. They had no friends. In fact, they were humiliated by Nepalis in the UK before they even arrived in the country. The man explained: "Before flying in, we asked a fellow villager to find us a small rental property in a Nepali home. But nobody would rent to us, even though thousands of local homes have been either owned or leased by Gurkha families. We were Untouchables. A few landlords openly castigated us for proposing to share a house with upper-caste nationals. We were devastated by this!" In the end, they did manage to find somewhere to rent, but not from Nepalis; their landlord was a Pakistani who did not ask, and did not care, what caste they were.

This chapter explores the issues of caste and casteism among Nepalis in the UK, particularly among Gurkhas. Here it will be pertinent to explain why I use the term 'caste' as an analytic framework to discuss social groups that comprise majority of the Gurkha forces. The confusion arises from the fact that, particularly from the

[2] According to the estimates of Rushmoor Borough Council, the local authority of the towns of Aldershot and Farnborough.

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early 1990s, many disadvantaged groups, including those supplying Gurkha soldiers, have identified themselves as 'ethnic groups' instead of 'castes'—many scholars have followed the same mode (for example, Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka, and Whelpton 2008; Lawoti and Hangen 2013). While I fully understand and respect the logic of using the more universal notion of ethnicity instead of caste, I describe these groups as castes here because (*i*) the 1854 *Muluki Ain* codified all hill Nepalis including non-Hindus into a single caste hierarchy, and its legacy in practice is still strong in Nepali society (Höfer 1979); (*ii*) the issues of ethnicity and caste are contested in Nepal; even high-caste Bahun and Chhetris have started claiming their ethnic identities (Adhikari and Gellner 2016b); and, most importantly, and (*iii*) just like the higher castes, ethnic groups also practise hierarchy, as evidenced by their dealings with Dalits.

Nepali Dalits in Britain are the centre of my analysis in this essay. Even though the Dalits are a small minority within the Nepali diaspora, I treat them as a special case because they are often the ones at the receiving end of the traditional social hierarchy. It is Dalits who face the most severe repercussions for breaking the rules of inter-group relations (Cameron 1998; Folmar 2013). For example, caste endogamy is the norm in Nepal. Marrying a Dalit is considered the worst form of transgression such that the upper-caste partner of such an unholy alliance is often effectively stripped of his or her caste status by being excommunicated from family and community. Worse still, there are sometimes violent reactions from the higher-status family in defence of their honour. Lawoti (2012: 132) notes: "Dalits ... are affected by the widespread practice of untouchability that considers them impure, denies them entry into 'higher' caste homes, and generally segregates them from the social mainstream."

The question here is: What happens to the same people when they settle among Nepalis in a foreign country like the UK where the socio-economic, cultural, and political environment is completely different? Does the caste system lose ground, or does it somehow continue to oppress traditionally dominated groups? I explore these questions by focusing (*i*) on the ways in which Nepalese Dalits continue to suffer discrimination and prejudice in Nepalese communities in the UK; (*ii*) on the military and migration contexts that have shaped the Dalit experience in the diaspora; and (*iii*) on the extent to which Nepali Dalit experiences match those of Indian Dalits in the UK.

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Overseas caste is still an under-researched topic. Researchers have established the continued salience of caste in neoliberal South Asia, particularly among Hindus (for example, Grey 2014; Still 2014), but little attention has been paid to what happens when South Asians migrate to distant shores. Some past research looked specifically at caste among early Indian diaspora populations in former British plantation colonies such as the Caribbean and Fiji (Jayawardena 1980; Schwartz 1967). Only a few studies have scrutinized caste in Western countries (Shah 2015b; Werbner 1989). In an unprecedented development, Indian Dalits in the UK have been campaigning against their continued discriminatory treatment at the hands of fellow Indians in Britain. They seek to have caste explicitly included under UK anti-discrimination law (Waughray 2009; Waughray and Dhanda 2016). Even though this movement, instigated in the early 2000s, has so far not been successful in securing an anti-caste discrimination law, it has nonetheless triggered public and scholarly awareness, and legislation in the House of Lords. There has been a clear polarization, even among scholars, between those who emphasize the point of view of high-caste Hindus and Sikhs (for example, Shah 2015a, 2015b) and those who sympathize with the low castes (Ghuman 2011; Green, Whittle, and Waughray 2009). My research indicates that the campaign by Indian Dalits in the UK could and should be expanded to include Dalits from Nepal as well.

This study used ethnographic fieldwork including participant observation and semi-structured interviews. I lived in an ex-Gurkha community in England from 2008 to 2012. In 2013 I revisited the country for six months for PhD research. During these stays, I met many Nepalis, in the main military men and their families from a range of castes, including Dalits. I had intimate knowledge of some Dalit families not just in the towns of Aldershot and Farnborough—my principal PhD research sites—but other English towns and cities, such as Andover, London, Folkestone, Colchester, and Brize Norton. Interviews took place in Nepali; many were with people I already knew well. They were then recorded, transcribed, and translated. All those participating in formal interviews signed a written consent form. Significantly, my own identity as a Nepalese Dalit was useful for the study of the Dalit community. Many research participants were forthcoming in sharing their stories of discrimination and

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domination both in the army and in the diaspora. Not all Dalits were willing to talk, however. Some found their experiences so painful that they simply would not discuss them. Some shared their stories, but did not want them to be recorded. Given the sensitivity of the topic, they feared reprisals from members of the upper/dominant castes.

THE CASTE SYSTEM IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH ASIA

Despite wide agreement about the salience of caste in South Asian societies, scholars do not agree on what its fundamental principles are. Dumont (1980 [1966]), probably the best-known theorist of caste in India, argued that caste has remained in force in the main due to its roots in Hindu religious ideology. For Dumont caste is essentially an ideology grounded in the structural binary of purity and pollution. Given their inborn ritual purity, the Brahmins are at the top of the social hierarchy. As the 'purest' caste, they are in charge of ritual (Dumont 1980 [1966]: 300). The most 'polluted' castes, that is, the Dalits, are relegated to the bottom. Dumont argued that the system of ranking by purity encompasses all castes (1980 [1966]: 262–74). Dumont's follower, Moffatt (1979), made the case that Untouchables in South India in practice and in fact express their consent to the caste system, despite the many material disadvantages it imposes on them, because they replicate hierarchy within their own communities.

There have been many critiques of Dumont, from Berreman (1971), who accused him of simply reproducing the Brahmin view, to Burghart (1978), who proposed a more contested and competing model of alternative hierarchies, to Dirks (1993) who argued that caste as Dumont described it was created by colonialism. Many authors have emphasized the ways in which caste is sustained by inequities of power and material wealth (Béteille 1965; Fuller 1977; Mencher 1978; Raheja 1988). In recent decades much research on caste in India has centred on the struggle of the lower or underprivileged groups, in the main Dalits, who, following in the footsteps of their legendary heroes like Phule and Ambedkar, have been fighting against their traditional economic exploitation, disenfranchisement, and socio-cultural exclusion including untouchability (Grey 2014; Gundimeda 2016; Natrajan 2012; Still 2014). Thus, far from internalizing their debased status, or 'Sanskritizing' to emulate the customs and culture of the superior

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castes (Srinivas 1952: 30), the lower castes are increasingly mobilizing politically in order to claim equal dignity and achieve access to power. Analysing the dominant trend in studies of caste, Indian sociologist Gupta (2004) declared that, in the modern era, identity has effectively "trumped" hierarchy. Thus, Dalit identity is transforming, as Aktor and Deliège (2010) put it, from "stigma to assertion".

While the caste system is seen as having its homeland in India, it is also salient in neighbouring countries, including Nepal, where more than 80 per cent of the population is Hindu and where the state was officially Hindu until 2006. Research has shown that low castes in Nepal continue to suffer like their counterparts in India, if not worse (Cameron 1998; Folmar 2013). They are not only socially excluded as Untouchables, but marginalized politically and economically as well. Unlike the Indian Dalits, Nepali low castes have not been able to launch effective campaigns for change and have not benefited from over 60 years of affirmative action.

However, the traditional authority of Nepal's high castes has been increasingly challenged by other groups both in the hills (Janajatis) and (more recently) in the southern plains of the country (Madheshis).[3] These agitating groups, which are de facto ethnicized castes, have launched various campaigns demanding proportional representation in the state, more access to state power, and recognition of their religio-cultural identities (Gellner 2001; Hangen 2010; Lawoti and Hangen 2013). This phenomenon is important for my analysis here for two reasons: (*i*) This anti-high-caste movement has influenced the diasporic communities as well; (*ii*) Some of the front-line campaign groups of this unprecedented insubordination are the Gurungs, Magars, Rais, and Limbus—the very middle castes from Nepal's hills and mountains who have always dominated the British Gurkha regiments.

Another critical factor in my analysis is the impact of British colonialism upon Nepal's caste system. Although Nepal was never colonized, colonialism nonetheless influenced Nepal's society indirectly. The anthropological historians Cohn (1996) and Dirks (2001) have argued that British colonialism consolidated and ethnicized India's

[3] Madheshi communities themselves are steeped in caste and, importantly, agitating Madheshi groups are often led by high-caste men.

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castes as it used the traditional system for its own administrative purposes. In an attempt to control a large, religiously and culturally diverse population, the ethnographically inclined British rulers and administrators classified the Indian population, with caste as the central principle, by means of the decennial population censuses. As a consequence, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, castes gradually transformed from locally significant collectives to national, or at least regional, units. This caste-centred policy of British colonialism was particularly important in the colonial state's military; this was all the more so following the 1857 Sepoy Revolt, when thousands of Indian soldiers captured and killed their British commanders (Fitchett 2009). In the aftermath the British increasingly redefined the policy of 'the martial race' (Streets 2004). Post 1857 they excluded purity-sensitive groups of Indian society—both high and low castes—and focused recruitment instead on supposedly more loyal and less Hinduized groups, such as the Sikhs, hill Rajputs, and Gurkhas from Nepal (Caplan 1995; Cohen 1998: 456).

The Gurkha regiments became increasingly caste-conscious and began to recruit largely from the four castes identified as Nepal's martial races—out of over 100 caste/ethnic groups of Nepal—from selected regions and villages of the western and eastern hills. According to my research participants, recruiting officers did everything in their power to screen out other unwanted castes, including the high and low castes. So, when India became independent, and Britain took its share of Gurkha regiments to Malaya, the 9th Gurkha Rifles—the only regiment that recruited high-caste Chhetri and Thakuri men—was left with India. Until the mid-1990s the majority of recruits in each of the four infantry regiments came from one caste (or 'tribe' as they used to be called): the 2nd, 6th, 7th, and 10th Gurkha Rifles consisting of Magars, Gurungs, Rais, and Limbus, respectively (Caplan 1995: 95). These regiments also included a tiny number of Bahuns in clerical and priestly roles and a few members of the low castes. The latter were hired to work in their traditional occupations: the Kamis for blacksmithing, Sarkis for shoemaking, and Damais for tailoring. These were vital support roles; members of other castes would not do them due to the social stigma. As a consequence, caste-based exclusion and discrimination became rampant in the regiment. Their involvement in ritually polluting tasks, as well as their official

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designation as non-martial, exposed these Dalit servicemen to prejudice and discrimination. According to research participants, prejudice in the Gurkha Army is still very strong. It was worse in the past, such that until the late 1960s and early 1970s, there were written rules forbidding the lower castes from entering the Gurkha kitchen and regimental Hindu temples.

This colonial history of caste explains why the majority of newly immigrated Nepalis in the UK belong to just four castes, and why so few Dalits are found in the UK. A large-scale survey of Nepalis domiciled in Britain, conducted by the Centre for Nepal Studies UK in 2008 (see Chapter 13 above), documented the dramatic shift not just in the numbers of Nepalis, but the caste/ethnic composition of the population (Figure 13.2 above, p. 319). Prior to the migration of tens of thousands of Gurkhas and their families, there was a small Nepali community in the UK, established in the 1970s and 1980s (Gellner 2013a: 144), which was, like most Nepali diaspora communities in developed countries, dominated by Bahuns, Chhetris, and Newars. The recent Gurkha migration not only boosted the Nepali population in the country, but also created a majority of the pre-eminent Gurkha castes. Because these castes have been active in Nepal's ethnic movement, the latter has evolved as a central part of diasporic politics. This has, by extension, impacted Dalits in diaspora in significant ways.

WHY BOTHER WITH CASTE AND CASTEISM ABROAD?

I have often been faced by the question: Why examine a sensitive and potentially divisive issue like caste in the diaspora? Some argue that flagging up the internal problems of a migrant community will potentially undermine a community already exposed to racism and exclusion by the dominant White population. Moreover, for those not having to deal with the issues of caste every day, caste may appear unfeasible or incompatible with Western society. Some Nepalis were openly hostile to my project. A few thought that it was foolhardy to try to track caste prejudice and discrimination in a secular, free, and apparently melting-pot society like England.

I argue that the study of overseas Nepalese Dalits is important in terms of both theory and policy. Tackling prejudice will potentially

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strengthen the migrant community, enabling it to better tackle the common problems posed by the host society. Dalits, like other immigrants, are faced with new challenges when attempting to establish themselves in an alien society. These challenges are compounded by the perpetuation of caste. Based on her ethnographic research into low-caste Ravidasia Sikhs in Barcelona, Spain, Lum (2014: 113) notes about Dalit diasporas in general: "They face not only the social and psychological challenges of biculturalism, but also, unbeknown to the host society, internal prejudice and discrimination." True, only a small section of the Nepalese population in Britain has been greatly affected by caste discrimination and harassment. However, this does not make the issue negligible.

Over the past decade, as mentioned above, Britain has been engaged in an unprecedented policy debate, something not seen elsewhere in the West: anti-caste discrimination legislation. UK policymakers were forced to consider this seemingly Third-World issue after Indian Hindu and Sikh Dalits started campaigning against caste discrimination within their communities. They claimed that, despite being settled in Britain since the 1950s and 1960s, the problem of caste had not gone away. As a consequence, the lower castes have been subjected to various forms of "hidden" discrimination and oppression (Green, Whittle, and Waughray 2009). They face harassment and indignity in houses of worship, work places, schools, and community events. Furthermore, they have been systematically excluded from community leadership. Organized under various campaign groups—such as the Anti-Caste Discrimination Alliance, International Dalit Solidarity Network, and Voice of Dalit International—these Dalit activists have called for legislative changes to protect victims of caste discrimination (Dhanda et al. 2014; Ghuman 2011; Waughray 2009). More specifically, they have called for the legal recognition of casteism as a form of racism.

In March 2013, responding to the Dalit activists' call, the House of Lords passed an amendment to the Equality Act 2010, intended to make caste a 'protected category' (Shah 2015b: 124), alongside race, gender, and sexuality, among others. Due to this push from the Lords, in April that year, the Act was adjusted to empower the relevant government Minister to use his or her discretion to implement the changes. This was then incorporated into Section 97 of the Enterprise

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and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 making it a duty on the government to act. Despite this progress, however, caste legislation has not yet been passed by the House of Commons and is unlikely to be passed any time soon (Waughray and Dhanda 2016). The major political parties have refused to meet the demands of the lower castes. High-caste community leaders, such as the members of the Hindu Forum of Britain, have not only dismissed the problems of caste discrimination in the UK (Shah 2015a, 2015b), but also influenced the political class in order to block the proposed anti-caste legislation. Lack of public awareness, and the persisting impression that caste is a problem only in South Asia, means that there is insufficient pressure on the government to act.

STUDIES OF CASTE OVERSEAS: NON-WESTERN SOCIETIES

Much of the research into caste overseas has been centred on Indian populations in erstwhile British plantation colonies. These are the early Indian diasporas established in the main through the indenture of Indian labourers between the 1830s and 1920s (Northrup 1995). Following the end of slavery across the British Empire in 1833, tea, coffee, rubber, sugarcane, and other plantations in the Caribbean, Fiji, Mauritius, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka suffered an acute shortage of labour (B.V. Lal 2012: 42).

The 1960s and 1970s were the heyday of the study of overseas caste, epitomized by Schwartz's (1967) edited volume. Aside from being the first book-length treatise on the subject, this remarkable volume has had a lasting influence upon the study of caste in foreign countries: (*i*) All of the contributions were on plantation workers and their descendants and the bulk of subsequent research literature on diasporic caste is centred on the same communities; (*ii*) To date, the major observations of this book about the status of caste abroad have remained, by and large, unchallenged. The uniform verdict of the editor as well as contributors was that caste in general failed to resurrect in the diaspora. In his introduction, Mayer (1967: 2) noted that caste was not a significant social unit in these communities. He further added that caste-based purity and occupational specialization, the hallmarks of the caste system, had received a "mortal blow" in the

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diaspora (Mayer 1967: 3). Many later studies supported the above findings. Jayawardena, who studied Indians in Fiji and Guyana, argued that one of the fundamental changes under conditions of indenture had been the "disintegration" of caste: it survived merely as "shreds and patches" (Jayawardena 1971: 114). The caste system was no longer salient in core areas such as marriage, food, and physical contact. His 'disintegration' thesis was supported by many other scholars subsequently (Clarke, Peach, and Vertovec 1990: 13; Grieco 1998; Hollup 1994; Singh 2014: 261; Vertovec 2000).

Scholars also agree in their analysis of why caste disappeared. Caste was not a part of the recruitment policy. Labourers were drawn from Hindu and Muslim communities across the vast regions of the Indian subcontinent. The focus was mainly on peasants, those experienced in and capable of toiling long hours. In 1898, out of over 12,500 labourers dispatched to Trinidad from the port of Calcutta, 16 per cent were Brahmins and other upper castes, 41 per cent other castes grouped as agriculturalists, and 22 per cent low castes (Mahase 2012: 15). Many feared to join the workforce in part due to the fear of crossing the *kala pani*, the black waters. In the traditional Hindu understanding, this was considered so polluting that it would cost the travellers their caste and social status (Lal 1998).[4]

The colonial authorities did not pay much attention to indentured workers' sensitivities to caste. Conditions on board ship, as well as on the estates, were so bad that some have likened indenture to "a new system of slavery" (Tinker 1993). Kelly (1991: 29) summarized the situation of indentured labourers: "Food is mixed, black water is crossed, caste is ignored by the Europeans in command ... those refusing to eat are forced to eat off dirty plates ... they have lost caste." Cross-caste liaisons became a new norm due to the absence of traditional caste and kinship networks, and the arranged marriages and endogamy that went with them. Thus, indentured labour became a great "leveller" of caste (Singh 2014: 242).

4 This fear of crossing the black waters was common in Nepal as well. For example, on return from his historic tour of Britain and France in 1852, Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana underwent ritual purification in order to regain his social status and prestige, on which his authority to rule depended.

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The collapse of caste under the indenture system is often contrasted with another method of recruiting labour during the colonial period known as the *Kangani* system (for example, Jayawardena 1968).[5] Particularly after the end of indenture in the 1920s, many labourers were recruited to work in rubber, coffee, and tea plantations, particularly in Malaya and Sri Lanka. Unlike indenture, in this case recruitment was concentrated to the Tamil communities of south India. Often workers were drawn from specific villages, communities, and families (Lal 2010: 43). A prominent member of the village, who acted as both the foreman on the estate and recruiter in the village, often hired workers from within his own caste, sub-caste, kinship, and family circles (Jain 1993: 8). As a consequence, the work place, though far from home, became an extension of the village with caste and kinship networks remaining intact. The result was that caste became a much more powerful force in the social lives of members of the Tamil diaspora in Malaya (now Malaysia) (Chan 1993: 443; Mearns 1987) and Sri Lanka (Jayaram 1975).

These studies of caste among Indian plantation communities are useful for our purposes here. In many ways the recruitment strategies and conditions of service of Gurkhas and indentured labour were similar, with many soldiers picked from peasant villages and taken abroad to fight and die for little reward. Many ex-Gurkhas recalled great hardship as they trained and fought in remote jungles and difficult terrain in harsh conditions. And yet, the Gurkha project was fundamentally different from indenture in terms of the former's caste-sensitive selection and mobilization. In contrast to the indentured labourers, and largely similar to the Kangani workers, the soldiers were recruited from selected castes and from selected regions and villages. My research found that often soldiery was a family tradition: most ex-servicemen had at least some relatives in the army and therefore, with them overseas. In other words, the Gurkha Army has been run in such a way that caste, village, and kinship links remain more or less intact. This, I will argue, has been critical to ex-Gurkha migrants' ability to revive and promote their caste identities in the diaspora.

5 For a detailed account of the working of the Kangani system, operating until the beginning of the twentieth century to supply Tamil coolies to coffee and rubber estates in Malaya, see Sandhu (2010).

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RESEARCH INTO CASTE IN BRITAIN

Post-war Britain attracted many South Asians. In the 1950s and 1960s large numbers of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Indians, Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim, migrated to Britain to fill the manpower shortage in its booming industrial sector. Initially, most of these men migrated singly; they were either unmarried or had left their families behind (Calverley 2013: 56). The latter joined the men in the 1960s and 1970s, which led to the establishment of overseas South Asian communities. Others arrived as refugees from postcolonial East African nations. Idi Amin expelled approximately 50,000 Indians, mostly Gujarati Hindus. Many settled in English towns such as Leicester (Jain 1990: 186).

Burghart (1987: 12), one of the early scholars to comment on caste among Indians in Britain, noted that caste—particularly caste associations focusing on welfare and caste unity—had survived in the UK, but not the system. Ballard's landmark edited volume, *Desh Pardesh* (1994), featured chapters on Dalits: Knott (1994) on Mochi shoemakers in Leeds (originally from Gujarat) and Nesbitt (1994) on Valmikis in Coventry (originally from the Punjab). Around the same time other researchers looked into caste among Indians in countries such as Belgium (Roosens 1988), where caste was shown to be important in social relations.

Interestingly, it seems that the most in-depth research into caste among South Asians in the West has been carried out among Muslims and Sikhs, rather than among Hindus. In her research among Punjabi Muslims in Manchester, Werbner (1989) demonstrated the salience of caste as a system of ranked hierarchy among Punjabi Muslims. While Hindu-style restrictions, such as commensality, untouchability, and other forms of purity and pollution, were absent, the notion of in-born social hierarchy was strong. The Sayyids, descendants of the Prophet, considered themselves as the apex caste, while the Musali, sometimes dubbed as half-Muslims and who consumed pork, were seen as low caste (Werbner 1989: 290). Werbner argued that, practically speaking, the *biradari* (generally understood as the network of kin) formed the basis for the working of equality and inequality; thus "the immanence of caste [was hidden] behind a façade of fraternal kinship" (Werbner 1989: 294). In a similar way Shaw (2000) demonstrated the central role of caste, disguised as *biradari*, among Pakistani Muslims in Oxford.

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Research has also shown that caste is entrenched among Punjabi Sikh communities in the West. Their houses of worship, *gurdwaras*, have been the overt manifestations of deep divisions principally based on caste. Ghuman (2011: 98) notes: "Sikh *gurdwaras* in the UK, North America and Europe are now established along caste lines and are reproducing and reinforcing caste divisions amongst their devotees." Sikhs in Leicester, England, are a typical case. In 2001 the city had a Sikh population of 12,000, who attended six well-established gurdwaras as well as a few more in the process of being set up (Singh and Tatla 2006: 74). Initially, until the 1960s, everyone in the city used to worship in one gurdwara. Low-caste Ravidasias, who initially worshipped in the mainstream gurdwaras, opened their own in 1985 in part to escape exclusion from the upper castes, mainly the dominant Jat Sikhs. Lum's (2011, 2014) study of Ravidasias in Spain has already been cited.

Recent policy-oriented research has established the existence of caste prejudice in the UK (Dhanda et al. 2014; Ghuman 2011; Waughray 2009). Ghuman's (2011) work is particularly notable, showing that Dalit Indians of all ages, including UK-born schoolchildren, have been subjected by fellow South Asians to various forms of discrimination, including name calling, ridiculing, and caste joking, as well as systematic exclusion in schools, hospitals, and workplaces, and at community events (Ghuman 2011: 69). And yet, all this is taking place unbeknown to members of the wider society. For example, schoolteachers have no conception how issues of caste affect the well-being of Dalit children in their class.

Attempts to draw attention to caste discrimination in the UK and recommend government action (Metcalf and Rolfe 2010) have generated considerable resistance from high-caste community leaders. They received support from Professor Gavin Flood (2013), then professor of Hindu Studies in Oxford, who, while neither supporting nor rejecting legislation, cautioned that Metcalf and Rolfe's report was based on too limited a sample and that much more research was needed. P. Shah's (2015a) recent book, *Against Caste in British Law*, is more outspoken. Shah, Reader in Culture and Law at Queen Mary College, University of London, vehemently attacks the idea of caste legislation in British law, maintaining that caste has never been a problem in Britain. He repeats a common line found among Hindu nationalists in India, that

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lower-caste activists are playing into the hands of (and are in the pay of) foreign agents—governments, missionaries, and others—intent on interfering in India's internal affairs and defaming and demoralizing Hinduism.

With due respect to the opposing viewpoints of activists and academics on both sides of the UK caste debate, I assert as ethnographic fact, which is clear from the various sources cited earlier as well as my own work elsewhere (Pariyar 2011) and here, that caste consciousness exists in the UK: among Nepalis, among Indians, and among other South Asians.

CASTE DISCRIMINATION IN BRITAIN: NEPALI EXPERIENCES

Nepal has outlawed caste discrimination, but informal social norms and institutions continue to subject Dalit citizens to various forms of prejudice and discrimination. They often face physical violence and intimidation, especially when they flout rules of untouchability. Folmar (2013: 88) notes about the contemporary situation of low castes in Nepal: "Dalits are still subjected to an array of discriminatory behaviours ... Dalits can enter the houses of only the most progressive higher status people ... they have separate places of worship, must sit outside teashops and are not allowed to touch high-caste people." The situation of Dalits in Britain certainly is not the same as that in Nepal, and their abuse may not be readily observable. However, low-caste Nepalis continue to be discriminated against and excluded within the diasporic community, covertly or overtly. In this section, I use ethnographic materials, including observed behaviour and personal anecdotes, to unveil the continued problem of casteism faced by many Nepalese Dalits in the UK. Specifically, I investigate the key contexts where Dalit identity is an issue: domestic space, everyday interaction, marriage, and community organization.

Untouchability—Hidden but Ubiquitous

When I raised the question of untouchability among Nepalis in the UK, many ex-Gurkhas denied its existence. A Gurung man in his forties made a typical observation: "If Dalits were treated as untouchables

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here, why do people wine and dine together in parties and functions? If people were so caste conscious, why do they use catering services owned and run by Blacksmiths for their communal festivals and gatherings?" I do not contest these observations. I have participated in many Nepalese festivals big and small across England, where Dalits mixed quite freely, and enjoyed singing, dancing, drinking, and eating without fear of segregation or ridicule. Furthermore, unlike in many Nepali villages and towns, I did not see Dalits being denied access to public resources run by fellow nationals, including hotels, restaurants, and grocery shops. And, contrary to the experiences of Indian Dalits in the UK, who were excluded from Hindu temples and Sikh gurdwaras in the 1970s and 1980s, there was no instance of Nepali Dalits being kept out of religious institutions, whether Hindu temples, Buddhist monasteries, or any other communal shrines. Indeed, some Blacksmith Gurkhas in Aldershot have been included in the leadership of Hindu religious organizations. This apparent absence of untouchability in the public arena is a welcome change. However, in contrast to the rules in public, Dalits often find that they continue to be treated as Untouchables in the private/domestic sphere.

In the normal run of things, Nepalis socialize with members of their family, kinship, and village circles. A high-caste Bahun would not normally visit a Gurung, Magar, Rai, or Limbu home—and vice versa—even if they met frequently in public functions. Nevertheless, I found that extra care was taken to avoid Dalits entering the house. Even when a visit by low castes was necessary, often the kitchen and makeshift altar for prayers were kept out of bounds. Thus, food and water, as well as the gods, were more likely to be defiled by contact with a low caste in the domestic space than in public. Indeed, not all Gurkha and civilian households practised this; I came across some examples of close relations between Dalits and non-Dalits. But, overall, caste sensitivities were strong in the private sphere.

Upper-caste Nepali households in England used a number of strategies to keep the Dalits away. First, as in Nepalese towns (Kisan 2005: 70), they refused tenancy to Dalits. Even though most ex-Gurkhas have been in the UK for a decade or less, being hardworking people who like to invest in property, many already owned a house. According to the chair of the Magar Association UK, by 2013 more than 90 per cent of working-age Magar Gurkhas in Britain lived in

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their own homes. In the meantime, many Nepalis shared properties and preferred to share with fellow nationals. However, Dalit tenants had little chance of sharing a house or flat with other Nepalis. Of the over 200 Dalits living in or around Aldershot and Farnborough, I saw very few Dalits sharing accommodation with non-Dalits. Exclusion of low castes from the domestic space was systematic (cf. Pariyar 2011). A retired regimental tailor in Aldershot said:

> No, most Nepali landlords in England will not rent their properties to Dalits, even if we offer double the market rate. They are so eager to screen us out that, while considering a potential tenant, they first inquire about the person's family name [which normally makes the caste clear]. If caste identity is not obvious from surnames, they ask further questions about the applicant's village, ancestral occupation, and, if he is a military man, his regiment and year of enlistment. When the caste identity is established, they make excuses to deny rental property to a Dalit. Recently, my own distant relative had a very bad experience in Reading. She had rented a room in a Magar house by lying about her caste; she had told the landlord that she was a Chhetri. One day, however, the man discovered her true caste identity from a friend and immediately asked her to move out.

Second, many Gurkhas kept Dalits away from their homes by excluding them from family functions, including their close friends from their village or town and/or regiment. Many Dalits found that they were avoided in the UK more than in Nepal. Despite the observance of caste restrictions, there is a degree of fraternity and socializing between Dalits and non-Dalits in Nepal (Cameron 1998). Many research participants lamented this change overseas, as it isolated them from their Gurung, Magar, Rai, Bahun or Chhetri neighbours and friends. A Blacksmith Gurkha shared his story: "More than twenty-five households from my village currently live close to my place. Some of them have been my close friends since childhood and we worked together in the 6th Gurkha Rifles. When we were in our village, I and my family were always invited to their family events. Sadly, nobody has invited us to their homes in England." What might lie behind this change in behaviour? The wife of a Sarki ex-Gurkha offered an explanation:

> The change may be in part due to the different structure of UK houses. In Nepal, they offered us food and drinks in the front courtyard or patio.

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> We therefore did not need to actually enter their houses to enjoy their celebrations. In the UK, however, the houses most Nepalis can afford are pretty small, which often do not have separate spaces to keep the Dalits. Besides, it is not practical to sit and eat in the front or back yard of these houses. They would therefore have to take us into the house straightaway. And, often the kitchen is quite close to the living room. Their prayer room may be close, or a corner of the sitting room may have been turned into a little altar – which they would not approve of our touching. Maybe this is one of the reasons why, unlike in our villages, we are not welcome at their family events.[6]

Third, Dalits were kept out of the house in order to observe the traditional rules of commensality.[7] Because most Dalits did not visit the houses of other castes, the observance of this rule was difficult to track. However, a few Dalits, in particular older veterans and their wives, shared their stories of upper-caste villagers refusing to share food and drink with them. A 75-year-old Damai and his wife were sometimes invited by a few of their fellow villagers for dinner. The wife said: "They occasionally take us to their houses, but they are reluctant to take us into the kitchen. They bring us food and drinks on the sofa. They do not eat or drink with us. And, the hosts ask us to do our dishes and keep them in a corner of the living room, which they return to the kitchen only after they are properly dry."

Besides, other castes rarely visited Dalit homes. And, when they did, they avoided eating or drinking there. Again, I observed this mostly in the older Dalits' rented flats. An elderly Sarki couple sometimes received some visitors in their flat in Aldershot. The visitors usually brought gifts, such as, whisky, beer, wine, and rice. They also spent some time talking about their new lives in England as well as reminiscing about their lives in their ancestral villages. Such visits made the older couple very happy. But, they were sad about the visitors, old

6 For another example of the way in which the small size of houses in the UK constrains the performance of Nepali culture (which presupposes plenty of outdoor space), see Pariyar, Shrestha, and Gellner (2014: 144).

7 The sharing of food and water with the Dalits is restricted in many parts of Nepal, so much so that they are forced to draw water from public wells only after the upper castes have taken their share (Bishokarma and Sharma 2013: 124).

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and young, not accepting any food or drink from them. The man said: "Some of them now accept Coke from us. They think that perhaps caste rules do not apply to soft drinks, which is an improvement!" I used to visit an elderly Damai in Aldershot, who was renowned for his skills in tailoring. He and his wife ran a small business from his little rental flat, sewing new clothes and repairing old ones for Nepali customers. Many customers visited his room and some spent hours chatting while he worked on his handheld sewing machine. I observed that the customers did not take anything, not even water. The tailors, aware of the situation, did not offer anything either.

Ubiquitous Verbal Abuse

In Nepal, there are several forms of discrimination and prejudice against the Dalits (Bhattachan, Sunar, and Bhattachan 2009). Unlike in India and Nepal, violence against overseas lower castes was rare in the UK, although many Dalits did fear it in case they flouted the caste strictures. Despite the scarcity of incidents involving physical violence, the overseas Dalits were constantly threatened with various forms of verbal abuse, which were either direct or subtle. Such everyday casteism causes considerable distress, frustration, and anger among the low castes. Many Dalits feel anxious when meeting other Nepalis and are worried when strangers ask their family names. My study identified name calling as one of the most common forms of abuse against the Dalits. Casteist expressions such as the 'dirty' Damai, 'black' Kami, and 'drunk' or 'smelly' Sarki were frequently used both literally and metaphorically. Sometimes the upper castes used these terms in an unthinking way, probably not consciously intending to dominate or humiliate anyone. Either way, the victims felt humiliated and denigrated by such utterances. Here are some typical cases.

An elderly Sarki Gurkha was very angry by the way one of the older veterans had mocked him. He used to frequent a small community hall run by a Gurkha organization in Aldershot, where he enjoyed chatting with fellow soldiers and watching Nepalese TV channels. One afternoon in early 2013, a fellow soldier humiliated him, unprovoked:

> Last month, as I was watching a Nepalese dance programme on TV, a man sitting next to me looked at me angrily and shouted: "Eat my testicles, you smelly Sarki!" He said this in his mother tongue, but I perfectly

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> understood the dialect. Now everybody around me was laughing and jeering at me. I quickly stood up and told him to eat my genitals instead. I had wanted to slap the man, but I controlled myself. I was the only Dalit in the room and his caste fellows could get even with me. So, trembling with humiliation and anger, I walked out of the hall – and have never been back there since.

Similar to the above, many other Dalits recounted their experiences of being vilified in the park, in the street, in cafés, and in shopping malls. To avoid such casteist taunts, low-caste people usually walked separately, and tried to avoid contact with other Nepalis as much as possible. In the communities I studied, the ex-Gurkha veterans in particular were deemed as most offensive, more so than high-caste Bahuns and Chhetris. A Dalit leader recalled a very humiliating moment in a public meeting of key community leaders from across the UK. He recounted:

> This was a crucial meeting comprising the representatives of all the important Nepalese diasporic communities in Britain. We were considering an effective strategy to make representations to the Nepalese Government in order to dissuade it from its plans to sell the lease of the Nepali Embassy building in a prime location in London. When one Rai man spoke much longer than his allocated time, the chair of the meeting—who is a respected community leader and retired Gurkha officer—told the speaker: "Come on, get to your main point and let someone else speak. Why are you blabbering like a Kami-Damai?"

Soon the gathering became silent with people eyeing each other suspiciously. A sense of unease pervaded the hall for some time, not because of what the chairperson had said, but because a Kami man, a prominent member of the community, had been insulted so much.

Anecdotes of such verbal abuse circulated among Dalits in the diaspora. Most Dalits—whether men, women, children, soldiers, or civilians—had such experiences. Like their Indian counterparts, prejudicial behaviour at workplaces was frequent. Some cleaning women had been told to consume beef owing to their lowly status. A few Dalit ex-servicemen I knew well left their jobs because they could no longer endure casteist jokes and ridicule from fellow Rai and Limbu ex-Gurkhas. They were employed by a private security firm to guard a large Sainsbury's warehouse. Security is the job ex-soldiers aspire to most, but these men were unable to continue. Their fellow

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workers kept telling them that they were not up to the job, in the main because they had never worked as proper fighting soldiers in the army (cf. p. 432 below). They mocked the Dalits on the basis of their ancestral occupations as blacksmiths and tailors, as well as on their supposedly filthy habits and drinking problems. Similarly, some Dalit parents were disgusted by higher-caste children telling their boys and girls at school that they were Untouchables and, therefore, some kind of subhuman beings.

I attended some Dalit annual gatherings, which were safe places for Dalits to share their experiences of prejudice and discrimination. While some seemed quite accepting of their situation, maintaining that nothing could be done to change it until the UK-born generation took over the Nepalese community, many others were really angry and frustrated. In general, nearly all Dalit men and women were confused and worried. They hated having to face the same casteism thousands of miles from home, despite having moved to what they believed to be an advanced and progressive society.

Forbidden Marriage—Including Among Dalits

Castes in traditional Hindu societies are seen as classic examples of endogamous social groups (Bailey and Peoples 2013: 164). As in Nepal, marriage with a Dalit is considered more transgressive than other inter-caste marriages. Even when the endogamy rule is broken the tendency is to marry someone from a geographically and culturally similar caste, for example, Rai with Limbu, or Gurung with Magar. Marriage with lower-status castes leads to the loss of prestige and honour, *izzat*, which is dear to every Nepali family.

In interviews, most Gurkha parents expressed their fear of loss of caste identity—and with it its culture and even religion—through, among other things, intermarriage. Though this threat is there even in Nepal, it is felt to be greater in the diaspora. Growing up in the free and secular environment of British society, and being in contact with so many nationalities, the chances of children falling in love with people outside their caste were much higher. A Limbu man said: "I am happy even if my two young sons and one daughter do not attend great universities or earn a lot in the future. But I will do my best to make sure that they marry not just a Nepali, but also a Limbu. You

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may see this as casteism, but it is my natural tendency to preserve my caste identity." Indeed, the motto of Tamu Dhee UK is "If identity is lost, everything will be lost."

I checked this parental interest in caste endogamy with some Gurkha children. They were not only aware of the importance of marrying within their own caste, but reported being constantly warned by their parents and relatives not to get too close with young people from other races and castes. And, importantly, the young people were well aware of the dire consequences to their future if they made the mistake of selecting a low-caste partner. They were aware that low-caste Nepalis were considered the worst kind of misalliance. A male teenager said: "Marrying a low-caste person is a risk I dare not take, not unless I could afford to be expelled from my family and community."

Notwithstanding these strong warnings, I did find a handful of inter-caste marriages involving Dalits. I talked to a few of these couples, who seemed to get on well with their younger friends, but they were shunned by their families and communities. The partner from the upper caste was usually forced to live with the family of the lower caste, as in Nepal. In one instance, a young Gurung man married a Sarki woman; they had no problems of acceptance among their young friends. They recognized that the repercussions would have been far greater if they had been in Nepal. Though they were not formally excommunicated from their castes and communities in England, the man's family did not accept the union. His parents did not attend the life-cycle rituals of his new-born son. The young family was not invited to Gurung family functions.

Interestingly, inter-caste marriage was similarly restricted between different Dalit castes as well. In Nepal (as in India), there is internal hierarchy among Dalits (Pandey 2006: 20). The Kamis consider themselves higher than the Sarkis and Damais, and the Sarkis above Damais. And there are often conflicting claims between the Kamis and Sarkis regarding their superior status. Nonetheless, often restrictions on, among other things, shared accommodation and commensality are observed here. In the UK, however, the boundaries between Dalit castes seemed to be largely blurred, except in marital relations. I saw many marriages between Dalit Gurkha children, nearly all of which were arranged by their parents and/or relatives. And, all these marriages occurred within the caste. When suitable partners were

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not available, they were sought from Nepal. This happened even in the families of some Dalits who were vehemently opposed to caste differentiation and discrimination. They did not seem to find any contradiction between their claim that the caste system oppressed them and their own preservation of the caste order through intra-caste marriage.

Thus, above all else, it is the institution of marriage that has been a critical factor in perpetuating caste and, thereby, preserving and promoting the identity of Dalits as social outcasts in the diaspora. Ghuman (2011) argued that marriage is one of the critical factors that has sustained the consciousness and practice of caste among Hindus and Sikhs in Britain. The Nepalese case demonstrates the same. Enduring caste endogamy has preserved and promoted caste division not just between Dalits and non-Dalits, but among the Dalits themselves.

EXCLUSION FROM THE COMMUNITY

Britain's Nepali diaspora acts as an extension of Nepal's ethnic identity politics and is a stronghold of the four pre-eminent Gurkha castes. For minority Dalits this development is experienced as disempowering. For one thing, the Janajati movement of the middle castes is completely distinct from the Dalit movement. There is no co-operation between the two (even though both groups suffer at the hands of the upper castes). The ethnicized middle castes in Britain have been keen to challenge the authority of the higher castes while, paradoxically, maintaining their traditional distance from the lower castes.

The increasing marginalization and disenfranchisement of Dalits in the diasporic community is caused by, among other things, the impressive rise of overseas Gurkha caste associations. Since the mass migration of ex-servicemen and their families, Gurung, Magar, Rai, and Limbu caste, sub-caste, and village associations have grown exponentially not just in numbers, but in their influence. The ascendancy of caste associations is evident in some of the largest diasporic gatherings and festivals owned and run by caste groups. Two examples stand out here. First, the Gurkha Cup—a popular one-day football tournament between Nepalese teams in the UK and some European countries—has become the largest annual gathering of Nepalis in

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recent years. In 2015 more than 15,000 people attended the competition. Similarly, the annual Nepali Mela (festival), which is the second-largest gathering of Nepalis, brings together over 5,000 Nepalis to London from across Britain. Interestingly, both of the above iconic Nepalese/Gurkha events are fully owned and run by the Tamu Dhee UK, which has emerged as the most influential caste association of Gurung Gurkhas.

All Nepalis (as indeed British friends) are welcome to these events, and often different groups are encouraged to display their religio-cultural identities. The Nepali Mela, for example, sees an impressive display of costumes, dances, songs, and ritual performances by several caste, ethnic, religious, and regional groups. However, all these groups take part in the festival effectively as outsiders under the umbrella of the host group, the Tamu Dhee UK. They do the same in some other large events organized by Magar Association UK, Kirant Yakthung Chumlung, and Kirant Rai Yayokkha of, respectively, the Magars, Limbus, and Rais. The Dalits too have the right to demonstrate their identities in these gatherings, but they rarely do so. This is due to a number of reasons. First, they are a tiny population. Second, their organizations are small and ineffective. Third, often the Dalits are not keen to display their cultural identities given the stigma attached to them. For example, although the Panche Baja, a set of traditional musical instruments played by the Damais, is considered a gem of Nepali folk culture (Tingey 1994), many Damais see it as a symbol of their untouchable identity and of oppression. Many youths do not want to learn this traditional art. In a similar vein, the Sarkis would not demonstrate their traditional skills in tannery. Although their skills were vital in Nepali society before the arrival of mass produced factory-made shoes and leather goods, this caste is not proud of their heritage because of the negative connotations associated with it.

The rise of Gurkha caste associations in the diaspora has further marginalized the Dalits because many large festivals and functions are exclusive to the respective castes. Each pre-eminent caste has its own calendar including a set of functions and festivals (Holmberg 2016). The Gurungs celebrate annual Tamu Lhochhar with great fanfare, as do the Magars their Buddha Purnima and the Limbus their Chasok Tangnam (see Chapter 14 in this volume). Nepalis from other castes may attend these functions only as guests. As a consequence, some

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of the national festivals such as the Hindu festival of Dasain, which is also Nepal's biggest holiday, have a declining appeal. Although the Nepali Embassy in London hosts a party including free food and drink every Dasain, only a few hundred people participate. National organizations like Non-Resident Nepalis UK (NRNAUK) also organize functions, but they are much smaller than the events organized by caste associations. The very success of the ethnicized middle castes in challenging the authority of the high castes has shrunk the public space available for minority castes, especially the Dalits.

Before the influx of Gurkhas, as in Nepal and almost everywhere else, high-caste Bahuns, Chhetris, and Newars controlled community affairs (see Hangen, Chapter 10 above, on New York). Despite the

Figure 17.1 Major (retd) Tikhendra Dewan speaks at the 'Best of Both' event (featuring speeches, music, dancing, food stalls, and charity displays) held in Aldershot on 4 February 2012 in order to bring the Nepali and White communities together after reports of problems and incipient youth violence. Next to Major Dewan is Gerald Howarth, Conservative MP for Aldershot and (at that time) Minister for International Security Strategy, who spoke first.

Source: D.N. Gellner.

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Figure 17.2 Nepali participants at the 'Best of Both' event.

Source: D.N. Gellner (4 February 2012).

authority of the high-caste individuals, there was no influence of caste-specific groups. But now caste associations have become increasingly powerful. Community decisions are heavily influenced by leaders of the prominent Gurung, Magar, Rai, and Limbu organizations (as was seen in the 2015 elections to the leadership of NRNAUK when the top officials elected were past leaders of their respective caste associations). Given that the Dalits have neither numerical strength nor politically active associations, they are even less likely than before to obtain leadership positions in the community.

Thus, despite living in a secular and free society, many Nepali Dalits in the UK have experienced ubiquitous discrimination and harassment, as well as exclusion from positions of influence in the community. A few are indeed involved in some community organizations, as advisors for example, but this is merely tokenism. As a consequence, despite so many problems, Dalits are unable to raise their voices. The three Dalit groups regularly meet and organize a few gatherings every year, some of which I attended. However, they have never officially raised the issues of the reproduction of untouchability and caste discrimination in Britain. Some individuals try to deal with their

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problems privately, while others just ignore them. Many are reluctant to raise the issue of caste in public for fear of reprisals, such as losing their jobs or businesses. So much so that a few prominent members of the Dalit community, who privately condemned caste discrimination in Britain, refused my requests to take part in a formal interview.

WHY ARE THE DALITS SO EXPOSED IN BRITAIN?

Often migration is thought to liberate oppressed groups from the clutches of their traditional societies. The Dalits experience this change as they move out of their caste-ridden villages and settle in towns and cities of the same country. Not only is there greater opportunity for occupational mobility in the urban setting, but also more anonymity (Mander 2002: 152). Thus, Dalits are better able to conceal their identities, and therefore minimize the risk of discrimination and harassment. Even though they never fully escape prejudice, lost in the crowd, as it were, they are less likely to be identified on the streets. It is common for male Dalits in Nepalese towns like Kathmandu and Pokhara, for example, to conceal their true caste identities in order to rent rooms or houses from higher-status Nepalis (Bhattachan 2003: xxiv). By this measure, the Dalits settled in English towns, where caste is an unknown concept for the majority population, expected to be even more anonymous. To their bitter disappointment, I have shown here that Dalits have been exposed to persisting casteism among diasporic Nepalis.

Why have Dalits been so visible within the diasporic community? First, as already mentioned, Dalits were recruited to each regiment in tiny numbers to perform their traditional stigmatizing roles. As such, they were support staff, not trained to fight as 'proper soldiers', and so inevitably appeared inferior. Conditions of work, and official or unofficial rules, imposed segregation. So who was a Dalit was well known to everyone.

Second, Dalit ex-servicemen's visibility is further amplified by their race/ethnicity. Whereas the vast majority of Gurkha soldiers are Tibeto-Burman-speaking Mongoloids, the Dalits are, like the high castes, predominantly Caucasian 'Aryans'. This difference is often visible in their physical appearance including physiognomy. As a Damai Gurkha said, "Our caste is written in our faces. It is thus impossible for me to claim to be one of the Gurkha castes."

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A third factor disadvantaging Dalits in the UK is the diasporic situation. Because so few of them were employed in the army, unlike the majority castes, most Dalit ex-servicemen do not have their extended families and kin with them. They lack a support network. As we have seen, their organizations are weak. Other Nepalis are not sympathetic. Nor have Indian Dalit campaign groups included Nepali Dalits. Thus, despite the obvious advantages of living and working in a developed country, the situation of Nepali Dalits in Britain is worse than that in their home country in certain respects. In Nepal the victims often have the support of their family and kin. In Nepal there are active national Dalit NGOs and human rights organizations to which they can turn.

Fourth, the continued lack of explicit caste legislation in Britain disadvantages Dalit migrants. Just as with racism, casteism need not involve physical violence. It may also be interpreted as part of the community's culture and religion, as Shah (2015b) has claimed loudly about overseas Indian caste. Nonetheless, these behaviours are deeply offensive to the victims. Just as 'Paki' and 'Negro' are hateful racist terms, so are 'Damai', 'Kami', or 'Sarki' when uttered with derogatory intent. In this regard, Indian Dalits' claim that certain forms of casteism must be interpreted as racism is valid. But the problem is that the UK Government, for whatever reason, has refused to enact anti-caste discrimination legislation. Unless physical violence is involved, the rights of the traditionally dominated castes cannot be defended in a court of law.

Therefore, many Nepali Dalits see a big contradiction between the country they have settled in and the traditional caste-related prejudice they have to face. A Sarki Gurkha said:

> It has been a great irony for us who live in British society that boasts of individual freedom and rule of law, that we have no legal recourse to fight untouchability and caste discrimination. These are the very issues the British Government has been trying to fight in Nepal using a substantial amount of its foreign aid; but, it has been refusing to recognize the same problem on its own soil.

A fifth factor is that in some ways the Dalits have brought discrimination upon themselves. A most visible form of this is their return to their highly stigmatized occupations in England. Some Damais have opened little tailoring centres targeted at Nepali customers, and some

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Kamis have either continued to work in the armoury section of the local army regiments, or opened jewellery shops in Aldershot. Trying to establish themselves in England, some Tailors and Blacksmiths felt they did not have choice. The concerned individuals and families were well aware of the cost to their prestige of trying to make a living by their traditional, stigmatized occupations.

Many small tailoring shops do not make a lot of money; so was the business worth their honour? A tailor's response was:

> I understand that I and my family would have got more respect if we did not operate this little tailoring shop. In fact, I had indeed tried working in private security, but I met with a number of problems. For one thing, I had never worked as a fighting soldier, so I was not very competent in my role as security officer. Another critical hurdle was that I struggled to work alongside Gurung and Magar veterans, who often teased and belittled me. Directly or indirectly, they kept reminding me that tailoring was the job I was born to do. They also gave me a hard time in order to create a vacancy for one of their own relations.

In these and many other ways, Nepali Dalits have found themselves very vulnerable to prejudice and discrimination from other Nepalis in the United Kingdom. This is why many Dalits felt, as a man whispered into my ears, "there is more caste in England than in Nepal". They may be able to hide their caste identities for a long time in parts of Kathmandu and Pokhara, but not in Aldershot and Farnborough.

I see a big difference between the situation of Nepali Dalits in the UK and Australia. In my four years in Sydney, I have met a few Dalit students and nurses. Although they have not been immune from occasional casteist jokes, they are not visible as low castes in a gathering of Nepalis. Because the majority of other Nepalis there are high caste, ethnically/racially similar low castes assimilate easily into the crowd. The latter are not identifiable by strangers unless their family names or ancestral trades are known. This is a luxury many Dalits in Britain are unable to achieve.

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Notwithstanding behind-the-scene influences, such as objections from high-caste Hindu community leaders, the UK Government's principal reason for opting to block caste legislation is apparently the lack

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of sufficient evidence of caste discrimination or prejudice on its soil. Surprisingly, the government has delayed action, even after its own study through the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) (Metcalf and Rolfe 2010), as well as a scoping study by the Anti-Caste Discrimination Alliance (ACDA) (Green, Whittle, and Waughray 2009), not only demonstrated the prevalence of caste discrimination, harassment, and exclusion in the areas specified by the anti-discrimination laws—such as work, education, provision of goods and services, and religion—but clearly pointed to the need for legislation to tackle the largely concealed but entrenched problems of untouchability and caste discrimination among Indians in the country.

In this chapter, I have argued that the Gurkhas, who have immigrated into England with their dependents in their tens of thousands since 2004 and 2009, have rapidly reproduced caste in the diaspora with inevitable negative consequences for Dalits. I have further suggested that this impressive rise of Nepali caste in Britain is in the main due (*i*) to the history of the Gurkha regiment and (*ii*) to the transnational influences of Nepal's post-1990 ethnic politics. I am not implying that civilian high-caste Bahuns and Chhetris have no role in the perpetuation of caste and casteism abroad. But my research focused more on the Gurkhas because, among other things, the number of Nepali Dalits prior to ex-Gurkha migration was negligible. In this way, my historiographical analysis has clearly demonstrated the UK's direct role in creating the situation of Nepali Dalits in its own territory.

Gurkha migration thus not only created a small Dalit community in the UK, but subjected it to many forms of traditional subordination and marginalization within the diasporic community. Of course, there are no rules about openly segregating Dalits from communities; however, given the unprecedented rise of caste associations, as an extension of ethnic politics in Nepal, Dalits have inevitably been sidelined. Their chances of acquiring leadership positions in the community have been diminished. Thus, even though they do not face as much structural domination as in Nepal, and unbeknown to the wider society, Nepali Dalits in the UK have been exposed to many forms of humiliating treatment within the diasporic community.

My analysis of the situation of Dalits in Britain is significant in a number of ways. First, it has demonstrated the need to expand the UK

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caste debate. The Nepali Dalit case shows that the problem of caste is not limited to Indian Hindus and Sikhs. As Gellner, Hausner, and Shrestha (2014) show, the Gurkhas/Nepalis resident in the UK consist of a range of faiths including Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, as well as indigenous faiths such as shamanism and Kirantism. My study found that, caste was seen as important by most Nepalis irrespective of their religious faith. Similarly, as noted above, research has shown that caste hierarchy is important among Pakistani Muslims too. Scholars, activists, and policymakers interested in tackling the problem of caste in the UK—and by extension other Western countries—must expand the debate to other similar groups. Caste associations, transnational politics, kin links, and marriage practices all contribute to the perpetuation of caste. The fact that public space may have been democratized sufficiently to allow numerous middle-status groups to claim a place within it by no means guarantees that the most stigmatized groups will not continue to be marginalized.

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PART IV

UNITING THE DIASPORA AND HAVING AN IMPACT IN THE HOMELAND

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18

THE NON-RESIDENT NEPALI MOVEMENT

Krishna P. Adhikari and *David N. Gellner*

IT IS A COMMON MISTAKE—a methodological trap—in the analysis of ethnicity, nationalism, and other social movements to focus exclusively on formal organizations and activists.[1] Such a focus leaves out of account 'banal nationalism', 'everyday ethnicity', 'lived diaspora', and so on. Yet, while an exclusive focus on formal organizations is likely to lead to mistaken concreteness in one's conceptualizations and an underestimation of the fluidity and creativity of social life, it would be equally one-sided and mistaken to go to the opposite extreme and ignore entirely formal movements and their deep impacts on

[1] We would like to thank Hemraj Sharma, Alan Gamlen, Daniel Naujocks, Surya Subedi, and Sondra Hausner for comments and suggestions; we take full responsibility for any errors that remain. The chapter draws on our work as part of the Vernacular Religion project [AH/H015876/1], described above, p. xv, and was written during the tenure of a University of Oxford John Fell Fund grant [103/758]. It was revised while we were both supported by the Caste, Class, and Culture project [ES/l00240X/1]; we thank the AHRC, the John Fell Fund, and the ESRC for their support.

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'ordinary life'. In the context of the present volume, it is essential to provide some account of the Non-Resident Nepali or NRN movement, which has set out to try and establish, for each country where they live, a formal Non-Resident Nepali Association (NRNA), federated to the worldwide NRNA. We aim to document the rapid growth of the NRN movement and the campaign for dual citizenship, which has not been done in a scholarly way before. We also need to raise the question of how successful (or otherwise) the movement has been in representing Nepalis in diaspora as it aspires to do.

As described in other chapters in this volume, Nepal has a long history of migration, with large numbers of people of Nepali origin settled in India, Myanmar, Thailand, and even Fiji. However, the beginnings of the most recent wave of international mobility, moving abroad for work and education beyond India, can be dated to a much more recent period, namely, the 1980s, and turning into a flood only after 1990. Compared to other South Asian countries, Nepal has a relatively short history of international migration. As a consequence, the formation of community organizations among these diaspora populations has been compressed into a comparatively short timeframe.[2]

The rise of the NRNA in the early 2000s and its continuous growth is remarkable.[3] In a very short time it has achieved a large degree of legitimacy as the leading, inclusive, pan-Nepali diaspora organization covering both People of Nepali Origin (PNO) living outside of South Asia (that is, people of Nepali origin who have taken citizenship in other countries) and others, who have retained their Nepali citizenship. It has had mixed success in its various aims: to safeguard the interests and welfare of Nepalis outside Nepal, to promote Nepali culture and tourism, and to contribute to the development of Nepal by, among other things, bringing foreign investment to Nepal. Despite

2 Community organizations were formed as early as the 1920s in Darjeeling (Minami 2007: 455; Chapter 1 above, p. 9), but these were consequent upon an earlier and distinct wave of migration.

3 The following abbreviations are used in this chapter: NRN: non-resident Nepali; PNO: person of Nepali origin; FNNO: foreign national of Nepali origin; NRNA: Non-Resident Nepali Association; ICC: International Coordination Council (of NRNA); NCC: National Coordination Committee (of NRNA); CNC: Continuity of Nepali Citizenship.

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this mixed record, the NRNA is increasingly viewed within Nepal itself as a strategic resource for the future prosperity of Nepal. For its part, the NRNA lobbied hard for the recognition of 'continuation of Nepali citizenship', that is, dual citizenship, for Nepali nationals who take citizenship of another country, and these efforts eventually bore partial fruit in the new constitution promulgated in September 2015.

There is an interesting contrast here with the Indian equivalent of the NRN, namely the NRI or Non-Resident Indian (*Pravasi Bharatiya*). Attempts to establish a worldwide NRI *movement* or body with affiliated regional and national chapters have not been conspicuously successful. GOPIO, the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin,[4] was founded in 1989, but it has been bedevilled by splits and is far from having the same degree of recognition as the NRNA within the Nepali diaspora. There is of course an NRI 'identity', as reflected in websites, films, and novels, among others. Starting in 2004, there is an Indian government-sponsored annual NRI day celebrated on 9 January, the day on which Mahatma Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1915 (Tharoor 2013). In fact, 'NRI' started as a tax status, granted to certain Indian citizens domiciled abroad in the 1970s and then in 2005 extended to PIOs, people of Indian origin (that is, citizens of other countries descended from migrants), so that they could become OCIs or Overseas Citizens of India. This was a conscious strategy on the part of the Indian state to tap into the resources of the Indian diaspora. OCIs, in particular, have the right to live and work in India for as long as they like without a visa, a work permit, or the obligation to register annually with the local administration; they are barred only from political involvement. To a considerable extent the NRN movement has been inspired by the facilities that the Indian government has afforded to PIOs and the desire to obtain similar benefits for NRNs.[5] In short, the NRNA may be more successful as a movement, avoiding challenges to its legitimacy and splits (despite the criticisms of it described below), but the NRIs would seem to have been more successful at obtaining substantial facilities from their home government, at least as things currently stand.

4 See www.gopio.com and www.gopio.net.

5 On NRIs, particularly in the US, see Naujok (2013). The two statuses, OCI and PIO, are now being merged by the Indian government.

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NEPALI MIGRATION AND DIASPORA ORGANIZATIONS

Historically, Nepali migration outside Nepal is linked to the British East India Company, later the British Empire, which recruited Nepali workers to work in India and other regions under their rule. As noted above, by the end of the nineteenth century Nepalis had long been in Tibet, and had reached north-east India (see Chapter 3), Bhutan, Myanmar (see Chapter 4), Thailand (see Chapter 5), and even Fiji (see Chapter 6). Nepali citizens recruited in the Indian and later British Army, known as Gurkhas or Gorkhas, travelled to different parts of the world to participate in conflicts in which the British Empire was involved, but they always returned to South Asia at the end of their service (many chose to settle in India or Myanmar rather than Nepal).

Until 1950 Nepal was closed to the outside world and Nepalis had few opportunities to travel overseas, although there was nothing to stop them simply walking out to India and from there to Myanmar and elsewhere. From the 1950s a small number started going to advanced countries in the West for professional training or education and a few of them stayed on. This trend continued to grow, slowly until 1990, and faster thereafter. By 2000 sizeable Nepali populations had emerged in countries such as the USA, UK, Japan, and Hong Kong. People started to migrate outside South Asia both for education and as economic migrants, and often the two motivations were combined. At the same time, increasing numbers of Nepalis were recruited to spend between one and five years at a stretch in the Middle East, Malaysia, and Korea as temporary migrant workers.

There is a longer history of Nepalis in the UK than in any other country outside South Asia. A Nepali, Motilal Singh, came to the UK several years before the visit by the first Nepali Ambassador to Britain, Jang Bahadur Rana, in 1850 (Adhikari 2013c). However, as with the USA, Nepali migration to the UK only began in the 1950s when people started to come for higher education and professional training. Founded in 1960, the Yeti Association is the oldest Nepali diaspora organization to be formed outside South Asia. The late King Birendra, then crown prince, was studying at Eton. He, along with Pashupati Shamsher Rana, grandson of Rana Prime Minister Mohan Shamsher, took the initiative to organize a small number of Nepalis living in the UK so that they could come together and celebrate Nepali festivals.

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Pashupati Shamsher was the founding chairman while Birendra became the patron of the organization. Yeti remained the only Nepali organization in the UK for a long time, until Nepali doctors working in the UK decided to form their own professional association in the 1980s. Both these organizations still exist; Yeti, however, is no longer so prominent or active, with the emergence of many other organizations in the UK.

Nepalis started going to the USA in the 1940s and in 1952 the first Nepali obtained permanent residence there (Dhungel 1999). The first organization related to Nepal in the USA, the American Nepal Society, was set up in 1967 led by former US Ambassador to Nepal, Ellsworth Bunker. The Nepal Studies Association, which later became the Association of Nepal and Himalayan Studies (ANHS), was founded in 1971. Like the American Nepal Society it was not a Nepali diaspora organization, but rather an association of academics related to Nepal. The Nepalese American Council was established in 1991 with the aim of providing an umbrella structure for all Nepali organizations in different parts of the USA. The American Nepali Medical Association (ANMA) was founded in 1997.

Other than in the UK and the USA, until the 1990s there were very few Nepali diasporic organizations outside South Asia and Myanmar (with the exception of Fiji: see Chapter 5 above). The Australian Nepali Association was established in 1976 and the Nepalese Association of Japan was created in 1988. These were relatively isolated cases at that time. Then, in the 1990s and 2000s, many Nepali diaspora organizations began to emerge in various countries (including branches of Nepali political parties and other associations active in Nepal itself).[6]

EMERGENCE AND ROUTINIZATION OF THE NRNA

Along with the increased migration in the 1990s, and particularly after 2000, the emergence of settlement pockets in different countries with

[6] See Adhikari (2012) for a preliminary analysis of UK-based organizations. Gellner, Hausner, and Shrestha (2014: 143–5) compare organizations in the UK and Belgium and give dates of founding. Much detailed information on UK-based Nepali organizations can be found in CNSUK (2011, 2013). See also Gurung (2015).

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a critical mass of people of Nepali origin gave rise to the specialization of associations based, *inter alia*, on ethnicity, region, profession, political ideology, cultural interest, and religion (Adhikari 2012). The previous broad-based types of organization that were designed for a small Nepali population could not adjust to the suddenly much larger population with diverse interests and dispersed settlement patterns. With the sudden flowering of new organizations, there emerged a felt need for some kind of superordinate structure that would, once again, bring all Nepalis together under one roof.

In certain countries such as UK, Russia, USA, Canada, Australia, and Japan a section of the Nepali population was already well settled and a few individuals had achieved high status in terms of wealth, education, or profession. Among them were men like Upendra Mahato, Bhim Udas, and Jiba Lamichhane, who had gone to the former Soviet Union to obtain higher education and then built up large businesses there after 1990. A group of like-minded elite individuals from different countries started discussing ideas and ways of having a pan-Nepali network covering all countries outside South Asia. Eventually, representatives of the Nepali diaspora from different countries and different sectors gathered in London on 31 August 2003. UK-based figures, such as Professor Surya Subedi (who drafted the constitution and concept paper), Raghav Dhital, Khagendra Nepali, and Chiranjivi Dhakal were key members of the founding committee.

Later that year, on 11 October 2003, after the by-laws had been drafted, the first NRN global conference was held in Kathmandu with the support of the Nepal Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) and the Government of Nepal (henceforth GoN). Since that time, 11 October has been officially observed as NRN day in Nepal. In the NRNA convention held at the same time, Upendra Mahato was elected unopposed as the first president of the NRNA. Individual membership is in the first instance of the National Coordination Council (NCC) in the member's country of residence. Each NCC then sends representatives to a federating committee called the International Coordination Council (ICC).

After 2003 there was rapid growth in the membership of the NRNA as well as in the number of affiliating NCCs (see Figure 18.4 below). Upendra Mahato became the undisputed leader and central figure in the early years, thanks to a winning combination of personal

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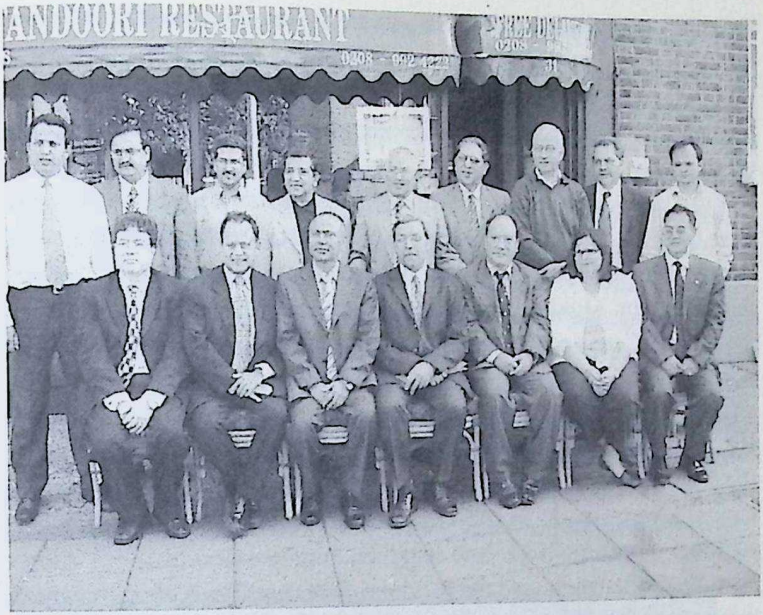

Figures 18.1 The very first NRN meeting in London, August 2003.

Source: D. Khadka.

Figures 18.2 The first NRN Global Conference in Kathmandu, October 2003.

Source: Courtesy NRNA.

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charisma and great wealth. He was re-elected in 2005 for a further two years. He attempted to retire from the role in 2007, but when this generated what looked like becoming a damaging tussle over the leadership, he stood for president for a third time, which took his tenure up to 2009.

Originally there were two vice presidents. In 2005 it was decided to have five vice-presidents in order to reflect the growth of the organization, one for each of five regions: the Americas, Europe, Australia, East Asia, and the Middle East. Furthermore, in order to deflect charges that the ICC was a club of senior males, a Youth Representative and a Women's Representative were both added. In 2007 a substantial change was made to the constitution by allowing members to elect ICC representatives from their respective countries and giving NCCs the power to participate in the decision-making process. Some further changes were made in the organizational structure in 2007 when regional representatives were renamed Regional Coordinators, rather than Vice Chairmen, and the previous positions of two Vice Chairmen were reinstated. The region of Australia was renamed Oceania, and East Asia became the Asia-Pacific.

Eventually, in 2009, Upendra Mahato decided not to stand for a fourth term as Chairman, opening up space for a serious contest over the leadership succession. As with most other professional organizations in Nepal, candidates aligned with different political parties began to manoeuvre and seek support on grounds of party affiliation. However, as also frequently happens, pre-election power-sharing agreements between the different aspirants meant that elections for the main positions were avoided and Dev Man Hirachan from Japan became NRNA president for the next two years.[7] That year, a new layer of organization, called the Patron Council, was created, perhaps in order to give an honorary position to the long-serving and revered founder-president Upendra Mahato and other founding members, even though its precise role was left undefined and there was no clear demarcation between it and the Council of Advisors. The representatives of Women and Youth Affairs were upgraded from being ICC members to ICC office-bearers.

7 See Gellner and Karki (2008) on the use or otherwise of elections in ethnic organizations in Nepal.

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In the election of 2009 there was controversy, because one contender, Ram Pratap Thapa, the previous vice-president and member of the Patron Council from Germany, believed he had an informal understanding and promise that he would be supported for the presidency. However, at the last minute, following negotiations behind the scenes, he was forced to withdraw. In 2011 he again contended but agreed to allow Jiba Lamichhane from Russia to rise to the top position without having to contest an election. Once again, in 2013, Thapa argued for previous agreements in favour of his candidacy, but without success. By this time the organization had expanded in new countries and Africa was added as a sixth global region. By the Sixth Convention of 2013 the practice of a leader emerging through consensus was no longer acceptable and contested elections at the international level started in earnest. A self-made millionaire from Australia, Shesh Ghale, and other officials and members of the executive were

Figure 18.3 NRNAUK president, Surya Gurung, welcomes three senior members of the NRNA-International Coordination Committee (from left to right: Ram Pratap Thapa, Dev Man Hirachan, and Upendra Mahato) with khadas and rosettes to the NRNAUK's first national council meeting, held in the Holiday Inn, Farnborough.

Source: D.N. Gellner (25 September 2010).

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elected. Similarly, an election was conducted during the Seventh Convention in 2015 in which Shesh Ghale was re-elected. Some people did not like the way in which alliances were mobilized, feeling that group mobilization tended to disrupt the democratic process and also threatened to split organizations, particularly at the NCC level. Observations of the latest conventions further added to the point that winning elections required, amongst others attributes, huge wealth, as (some) candidates resorted to sponsoring (some) voters to come from different countries to Kathmandu, paying their airfares, hefty entry fees, and accommodation in five-star hotels. However, the fact that elections could be contested at the highest level without threatening the unity of the organization could also be interpreted as a sign of the increasing maturity, stability, and strength of the organization.

INCREASING NRN POPULATIONS AND EXPANDING NCCS

As noted above, Nepali migration beyond South Asia has increased substantially in the last 20 years. Accurate information is not available but estimates based on the country of residence help to some extent to grasp the scale and trend of Nepali migration. The NRNA has collected estimated figures for the Nepali population outside SAARC for three different years: 2005, 2007, and 2012. According to these figures in 2005 there were 1.4 million Nepalis outside South Asia, which increased to 1.9 million in 2007. The figure for 2012 was, at 2.9 million, more than double the figure for 2005.[8] Some people in NRNA even estimate that the figure might have reached five million by 2015, though this is surely exaggerated (KC 2015).

The trend shows, on average, that annually more than 200,000 additional people are added to the pool of migrants. If the estimates are correct, the 2.9 million people of Nepali origin outside South Asia in 2012 comes to about 11 per cent of Nepal's total population in 2011. This, perhaps surprisingly, is much higher than the equivalent proportion of Persons of Indian Origin (PIO). India has a much longer history of emigration outside South Asia and Non-Resident Indians comprise multiple generations, whereas Nepali migrants (with exception of migration in colonial times to Myanmar, Thailand, and Fiji)

8 Available at: www.nrn.org.np.

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are mostly first or second generations only. Even though, according to one estimate (MOIA 2012), the number of Indians (combining NRI and PIO) living outside South Asia is almost equal to three quarters of Nepal's whole population, this is only about 2 per cent of the whole Indian population. In other words, proportionately, there are more than five times as many Nepalis outside South Asia than Indians.

The majority of Nepali migrants today are in the Middle East and Malaysia and they are mostly there for temporary work under special labour contracts which cannot be converted into long-term or permanent residence. The figures issued by Nepal's Department of Labour (DoL) confirm the increasing trend of foreign labour migration. According to the DoL, there has been a huge jump in the annual figures of foreign employment (their records only include those who obtain official permission). In 1994 only 3,605 people went abroad for employment, whereas 20 years later, in 2014, the number had risen to 527,884, making a cumulative total of 3,413,842. The total number of Nepalis obtaining permission for foreign labour for the first thirteen-year period from 1994 was 758,000. In the subsequent six years (2008–14) those obtaining such permissions reached 1.7 million. Figures show that between 2011 and 2014, the numbers have increased every year by 8 per cent on average (DoL 2015).

The GoN permits its citizens, by law, to go to 108 countries for employment (NRNA 2012). The GoN did attempt (often unsuccessfully) to place restrictions on female migration between 1997 and 2008, and again between 2014 and 2016 for domestic workers, to countries where it felt that there were inadequate safeguards against abuse; the position today is that there is no formal ban but there do seem to be de facto barriers (reluctance on the part of bureaucrats to issue documents, and so on) that restrict women from going to countries such as Lebanon (Amnesty International 2011). Nepal has diplomatic relations with 138 countries (Adhikari 2014) and it is believed that Nepalis have reached 112 of them. This is reflected in the gradual expansion of the NRNA's NCCs in new countries. In the first year, that is 2003, three NRNA NCCs were formed in Russia, UAE, and Qatar. Within two years there were 18 NCCs. In another two years, the number of NCCs more than doubled to 38; it tripled to 55 by 2009. In 2013, NRNA NCCs had been constituted in 65 countries, and by March 2016 it had reached 73 (Figure 18.4).

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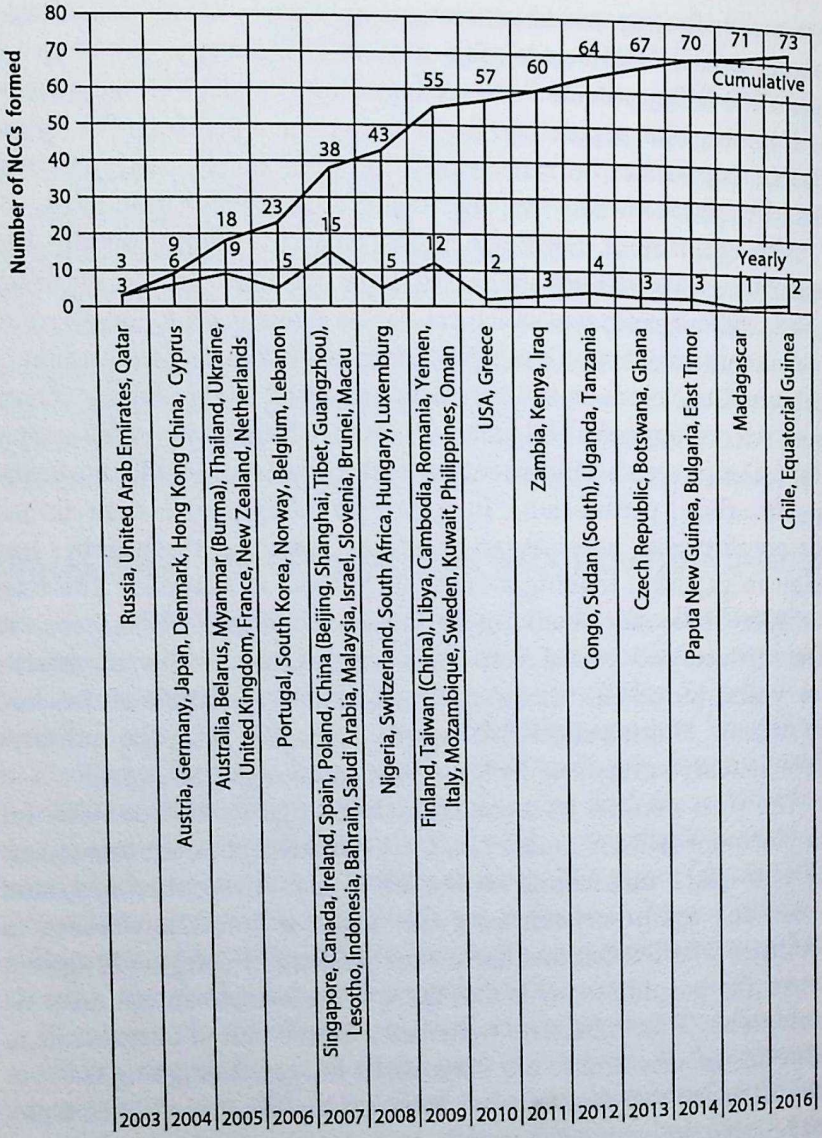

Figure 18.4 New NRN National Coordination Councils formed by year and country.

Source: Adapted from www.nrn.org.np.

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Countries where new NCCs are formed are mostly African and, as a result, a new position of African Regional Coordinator was added to the ICC in 2011. Most of the new countries have relatively small Nepali populations; globally, there are vast differences in the size of the Nepali population in different countries. Figure 18.4 shows the annual trend and gives the list of NCCs formed by year. In many countries where NCCs have been formed, such as Zambia, Lesotho, Congo, and Mozambique, there are as few as 20 Nepalis; at the other end of the spectrum countries like UAE have over half a million Nepalis or PNOs.[9] In more than two thirds of countries where NRNA NCCs have been set up, there are fewer than 10,000 PNOs. It should be noted that by default everyone meeting certain criteria counts as an NRN; but this does not mean that all of them are members of the NRNA. In fact, very few PNOs take out membership of 'their' NCC. It is claimed that by September 2015, about 50,000 NRNs have joined the NRNA, which, though only a fraction of the total population of PNOs, is an increase of 40 per cent over the previous term. In the next sections we take up these issues of definition and representativeness.

NRNS AND THE GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL

The NRNA has been successful in winning recognition and support from the GoN. The main objectives of the NRNA were to serve Nepal by bringing much-needed foreign investment, technology, and remittances. In line with international trends, and in line with much thinking in international development, Nepal too started to regard its non-resident citizens and Foreign Nationals of Nepali Origin (FNNO) as strategic resources for Nepal's development.[10]

9 PNO stands for People of Nepali Origin, which includes both those who are recognized as NRNs by the NRN Act 2007 and those who are not. There are estimated to be more than 100,000 PNOs in eight countries; in 13 countries between 10,001 and 100,000; in 22 countries between 1,000 and 10,000; and in the remaining 22 fewer than 1,000.

10 See Adams and Page (2003), Gamlen (2008, 2014), UNDP (2009). Shakya (2013: 174–5) claims that the government and the private sector are still not doing enough to ensure that NRN remittances are invested productively. For a theoretical overview of state-diaspora relations, see Délano and Gamlen (2014).

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The first NRNA committee lobbied for statutory recognition of the NRNA as a legal entity and rights for NRNs with regards to investment and welfare. It eventually succeeded in acquiring legal status through the Non-Resident Nepali Act 2007. The law accepted both Nepali citizens residing outside SAARC countries and FNNOs of those countries as NRNs. However, the other qualifications of NRNs enshrined in the law conflicted with the rights sought by the NRNA, which inhibited the NRNA from registration in Nepal. The NRNA argued that anybody living outside South Asia for more than 182 days was an NRN, whereas the law required such persons to be outside South Asia for more than 2 years. However, this did not stop the NRNA from operating in Nepal and receiving government support. Eventually, the NRNA agreed to make changes in their constitution as per Nepal's laws and was registered in 2013. But this registration meant that some previously registered members, particularly students with courses lasting less than two years, and a large number of short-term workers in the Middle East and Malaysia, were disqualified overnight.

The NRNA initially opened its secretariat at the FNCCI in Kathmandu. It is was perhaps natural for the NRNA and FNCCI to become strategic partners, given that the NRNA was initially led by a noted industrialist coupled with the fact that the GoN's focus was on bringing in foreign investment. As a commitment to the NRNA, the GoN hosts its biannual global conference in Kathmandu. The GoN sets up an organizing committee comprising Ministers and high-level government officials and allocates some resources. Spending taxpayers' money in this way is often criticized in Nepal. It is, of course, an easy target when a meeting of what is perceived to be a rich man's club receives government funding to the tune of NR 3 million. Since this contribution is a fraction of the total cost of the conference (NRNA 2013c: 93), and in view of the criticism in Nepal, the NRNA decided to return the government's contribution in 2013 and did not ask for any contribution in 2015.

The NRN Act 2007 (MoLJPA 2007) mandated an NRNA Advisory Board headed by the Vice-Chairman of the National Planning Commission. The Board includes Secretaries for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Industry, the Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank, the Finance Advisor of the Prime Minister, and the

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NRNA ICC president. The same Act extends some limited privileges to holders of NRN identity cards. The card is issued following the narrow definition of NRNs preferred by the GoN. The NRN card allows its holders, as with other Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), to take their capital and profits back to their country of residence. The validity of the NRN ID card issued to NRNs with Nepali nationality is normally for at least two years, but this could be for longer if that person has a longer visa for their country of residence. NRNs who are FNNO receive an NRN ID for 10 years, which also allows them limited rights to buy, own, and sell property in Nepal. While NRNs with Nepali nationality can obtain an NRN ID card for US$50, FNNOs living in the USA, European countries, Japan, Korea, and Australia need to pay US$500; residents of other countries are charged US$250 (MOLJPA 2007).

Given the geopolitical proximity and cultural similarities, it is perhaps not surprising that many of Nepal's policies were similar to those of India; the NRN ID card is comparable to India's NRI ID card. The comparison, however, does not favour Nepal. The NRNA complained that Nepal's policy is less liberal than India's both in terms of the cost of the card and in terms of facilities granted, whether to Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) (since 1999) or to Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) (since 2005) (NRNA 2010b). PIO cardholders can live indefinitely, work, study, own property, or make investments; they are excluded only from government employment and voting in Indian elections. The OCI card is for a much longer period (15 years) than the NRN card (10 years) and the former can be obtained for a much lower fee (INR 15,000 for adults and 7,500 for children under 18). For these reasons, and others explored below, this much-hyped flagship programme of the GoN seems not to have had wide appeal: only 816 people had taken out the NRN ID card by September 2015. In the UK, where 31,938 Nepali nationals had taken out British citizenship by the end of 2016 (see Figure 13.3 above, p. 323), only about 100 NRN ID cards had been issued by the Nepal Embassy. This lack of interest in the NRN ID card may be connected to the demand for dual citizenship, which had become the NRNA's priority, as discussed below, even though for many NRNs the NRN ID card is still relevant because their country of residence does not support dual citizenship.

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GOALS AND RELEVANCE: FLAGGING PROGRAMMES

The NRNA was established with the goals of promoting Nepal's development by bringing investment to Nepal and promoting Nepal's culture, while also uniting Nepalis living abroad and safeguarding their welfare. Though it is very difficult to measure to what extent the preservation of culture and the promotion of tourism to Nepal have been achieved, it is a matter of common observation in the Nepali diaspora that PNOs, even without the NRNA, have done much in this field. However, when it comes to bringing in investment, the achievements, at least when compared with the initial euphoria and ambition, have been rather limited, and this has provided ammunition to critics of the NRNA (for example, Paudel 2013). The accusation is that global conferences are ways for members of the Nepali elite abroad to network and accrue political capital through the promise of attractive projects. For example, the NRNA's Second Global Conference in 2005 announced the establishment of a '100 Million USD Nepal Investment Fund', the setting up of a 'Skills Enhancement Centre' to train foreign labour migrants, a 'Knowledge Bank' to utilize the skills and knowledge of NRNs for the benefit of Nepal, and a 'One District, One Charity Programme'. Most of these programmes either were not initiated or were only very partially implemented. In a similar way the Third Convention announced 'Public Welfare Projects' for the conflict-affected districts and the setting up of 'Nepali Cultural Centres' in many countries. Only a few of these targets were met. The Fourth Convention, which had perhaps learned the lessons of the over-ambitious targets of previous meetings, adopted rather soft and populist slogans, such as 'We, not I' and 'Send One Friend to Home (Nepal)' on the occasion of Nepal Tourism Year 2011. The focus was also on implementing the earlier programmes of 'Skills Training' and the building of 'Nepali Houses' (Cultural Centres) in countries where NCCs have large number of members, again with limited success.

Coinciding with the Nepal Investment Year 2012–13, the Fifth NRNA Convention decided to set up a 'Collective Investment Fund' and to run a '100 MW Electricity Project'. The NRNA also promised to support the implementation of the Kathmandu–Hetauda Tunnel project for a fast-track motor road linking the capital with the Tarai. Some of these projects have been initiated but achievements are limited.

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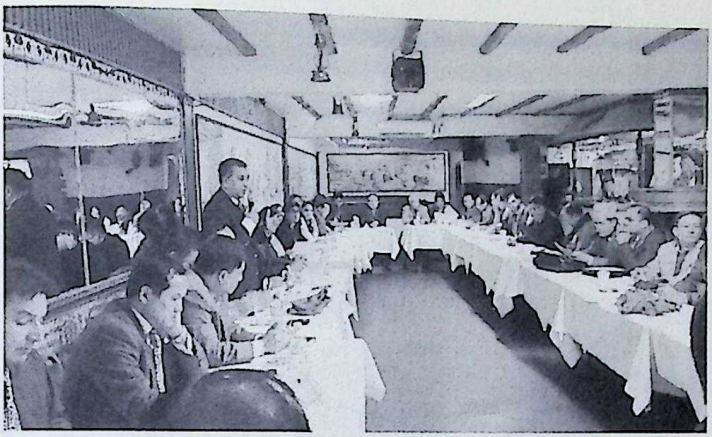

Figure 18.5 Restaurateur and businessman, Mahanta Shrestha, addresses an NRNAUK planning workshop held at the popular Nepali venue, the Nirmaya Rodhi Ghar, Aldershot.

Source: B.G. Shrestha (8 January 2012).

Of the 100 MW electricity production targeted, projects amounting only to 27 MW have been initiated by the collective investment fund. NRNA members are taking some share in the tunnel-building project.[11]

The Sixth Convention gave continuity to previous commitments. However, the earthquakes of 2015 meant that NRNA altered its priorities and re-focused on rescue and relief work. The Seventh Convention that took place in October 2015 adopted the slogan 'NRNA: A True Partner in Nation Building' (*NRNA: Rastra nirmanko saccha sajhedar*). Under the leadership of its Chairman, Shesh Ghale, the NRNA mobilized resources from across the globe and joined other humanitarian agencies and the GoN in providing relief to earthquake victims. Its latest target is to rebuild 1,000 houses, having obtained permission from the government.

[11] A study commissioned by the NRNA and carried out by the Society of the Economic Journalists-Nepal in nine districts that have high concentration of NRN investments found that by the end of 2014 there had been NR 29,855 million investment in 67 enterprises. There is a high concentration in Kathmandu (78 per cent of investment) (SEJON 2015).

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Over the years numerous minor welfare projects have been implemented in Nepal both on an individual and on a collective basis. The NRNA newsletter published to mark ten years since the establishment of the NRNA listed its achievements as:

1. Extension of the NRNA to 65 countries;
2. All Nepal's political parties have agreed to the continuation of Nepali citizenship (that is, dual citizenship);
3. Congenial environment for investment after the enactment of NRN Act;
4. About 40 billion rupees of investment by various individuals;
5. 27 MW Dardikhola hydro-power project initiated with about 5 billion rupees investment; continuously working with GoN in identifying the problems and providing solutions in foreign employment;
6. Contribution of about 1 billion rupees to charitable work;
7. Conducting Nepal promotion campaigns worldwide; and
8. Enhancing the reputation of Nepalis abroad. (NRNA 2013b: 9)

Representatives of the NRNA often argued that in order for them to fulfil their promises, including foreign investment, they need incentives and a proper investment environment, and the GoN claimed that the NRN Act already provides this. However, the NRNA always countered that the most important incentive is the provision of dual citizenship or Continuation of Nepali Citizenship (CNC), which, once obtained, they argued, would pave the way for a much increased flow of NRN resources into Nepal. Now that this has been achieved, and enshrined in the 2015 Constitution, it will in due course be possible to test this claim.

THE DUAL CITIZENSHIP CAMPAIGN: OPPOSITION AND ULTIMATE SUCCESS

Even though the NRN ID system opened some practical space for FNNOs to keep or maintain their link to Nepal, NRNs with Nepali nationality did not find the card scheme particularly attractive. Because the NRN Act (2007) and subsequent Regulation (2009) were introduced at the very time when Nepal was drafting a new constitution, NRNs were encouraged to believe that for many NRNs the NRN

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ID card policy would only be an interim arrangement (NRNA 2010b). They decided to push further for the dual citizenship provision. The NRNA formed a study team, led by Dr Ambika Adhikari, to report on the benefits of NRN ID cards. Presenting their report in 2010, the team recommended that the retention of Nepali citizenship should be the ideal goal and in addition put forward several suggestions to enable the NRN ID card to be more useful in the interim (NRNA 2010b).

In sum, the main reasons why so few people took up NRN ID cards are three: (*i*) de facto (business as usual) dual citizenship practices (Adhikari and Gellner 2012); (*ii*) the prospect of having de jure dual citizenship in the future; and (*iii*) in-built complexities and ambiguities. When applying for an NRN ID card, the applicant must declare all personal details, including the date of acquisition of foreign citizenship. In other words, in practice, applying for the ID card means renouncing one's Nepali citizenship, because it is a public statement that one has taken out the citizenship of another country.

The fact that the NRNA took a fairly agnostic position may have played a role in the low take-up of NRN ID cards: it neither encouraged nor discouraged NRNs to avail themselves of the card. The Citizenship Act of Nepal (2006) stipulated that: "Any citizen of Nepal who voluntarily acquires the citizenship of any foreign country shall automatically lose the citizenship of Nepal" (MoLJPA 2006: Section 10(1)). Given the lack of any mechanism that would compel the return of Nepali citizenship papers and passport, most people who became citizens of a foreign country simply retained their Nepali documents and continued business as usual as if they had not automatically given up Nepali citizenship. Choosing to opt for the limited benefits of the NRN ID cards would not only jeopardize this de facto practice of dual citizenship; it would also expose to public view the fact that one has taken out a different nationality. With a high-profile campaign in process and frequent assurances from top Nepali politicians, people believed that the imminent prospect of obtaining dual citizenship with better privileges was more advantageous than the NRN ID card. It would therefore be foolish to renounce their Nepali citizenship in a public manner just when dual citizenship was going to become viable.

Even though the idea of dual citizenship would apply only to the minority of NRNs living in Europe, America, Australia, and Asia, it

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became a flagship campaign of the NRNA. During the first term of the Constituent Assembly (2008–12), the NRNA intensified its lobbying: it sent several delegations to Nepal from different countries, invited leading politicians on foreign visits, and utilized each other's personal visits to Nepal or abroad to inform political leaders about the demand for dual citizenship. After the first CA elections, the NRNA formed a Constitution Recommendation Committee led by Surya Subedi to solicit opinions from every national committee and outline the NRNA's vision; its report was submitted to the Chairman of the CA by Upendra Mahato.

Political leaders often made hollow commitments to work towards the idea of dual citizenship, but when it came to translating such promises into practice they found there were obstacles that they did not anticipate. In April 2010 a Task Force was set up by the NRNA, led by Ram Pratap Thapa, to write an NRNA position paper on the issue. It argued for the continuation of Nepali citizenship, which would bring several benefits, it was claimed, both for Nepal and for NRNs:

> Dual citizenship or dual nationality (used here interchangeably) provision for FNNOs will help them maintain their cherished relationship with Nepal and their family and friends and also provide them with impetus to invest in Nepal, thus contributing to Nepal's overall development. In addition, it will encourage FNNOs and their children and grandchildren to build closer ties with Nepal, have a strong sense of belonging and preserve and take pride in their rich heritage. FNNOs and their children, many of whom are likely to occupy positions of leadership in their country of domicile, could be major catalysts in developing and strengthening trade, economic, cultural and educational ties between Nepal and countries of the world. Dual citizenship can be a strong incentive for many, many NRNs/FNNOs to return to Nepal. By allowing it, Nepal stands to benefit from a likely reversal of the brain drain that Nepal has been suffering for some time. Furthermore, dual citizenship could help reduce the current outflow of capital from the country believed by many to be largely due to the very restrictive citizenship and property laws and rules. (NRNA 2010a: 3)

In order to make the demand more appealing on emotional grounds, euphemistic alternatives such as the 'Continuity of Nepali Citizenship' and 'Once a Nepali, Always a Nepali' have been used to

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replace the rather selfish-sounding (unpatriotic) 'Dual Citizenship' or 'Dual Nationality'. As the first CA's term was extended (2010–12), the fifth ICC led by Jiba Lamichhane formed a 'Continuity of Nepali Citizenship' (CNC) campaign headed by Ram Pratap Thapa, which renewed efforts to win political favour.

The position paper mentions Gurkha soldiers in an attempt to give further impetus to the arguments for CNC. A small group of people also made a special case for Gurkhas, arguing that they deserved to be looked after distinctly and compassionately, because, it was claimed, their destiny to leave Nepal was the result of decisions by the GoN rather than their own conscious and rational choice. It is not clear, however, how the Gurkhas' plea adds to the case in any objective sense, because, whatever may have been the case in previous eras (when the GoN certainly encouraged Gurkha recruitment by the British), in recent decades enlisting in the British army, settling in Britain, and taking British citizenship is a purely voluntary decision by the individuals concerned and can hardly be seen as the result of coercion on the part of the GoN.

Despite winning political assurances, the NRNA did not immediately secure the required support to get full-fledged CNC for those who were previous nationals or children of previous nationals of Nepal. A large number of Constituent Assembly members and significant numbers of Nepalis from different walks of life were not in favour of full-fledged dual citizenship. NRNs were seen by many as an opportunistic 'creamy layer' of society (as it is called in India), always seeking benefits without taking any responsibility. The nationalistic discourse, which sees anyone who decides to settle outside Nepal, and even worse, then takes out citizenship in another country, as having betrayed their motherland, is still highly persuasive within Nepal, even though many people have someone either in their family or among their immediate relatives who has done so. There is, in addition, resentment against the wealthy foreign-based Nepalis (mixed with pride at their achievements); it is easy to represent them as seeking benefits, through citizenship, that ought to go to Nepalis who have never left Nepal. The following statement from Kumar Lama, published in Nepali on the website Mysansar.com, epitomizes such general feelings against the NRNA and its demands:

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> In the NRNA, there is a domination of people who think that they should be allowed to become Nepal's President despite their life-long service in a foreign country, and despite their having a vested interest to loot the already ravaged Nepal by asking for rights to take their properties abroad in dollars. The demand for dual citizenship is the direct result of such interests. In fact, the NRNA was established in 2003 with a hidden agenda of finding an easy way of taking income abroad from investments in Nepal. In the past 10 years, this organization has not been particularly able to attract established and reputed Nepalis living overseas. (Lama 2013; translation by the authors)[12]

The case of the Gurkhas might be thought to attract more sympathy, but, for critics, service in the army of another country is considered even more shameful than working outside the country. Thus, many thought that, whatever assurances senior politicians might give when speaking to audiences of NRNs, full-fledged dual citizenship, as campaigned for by the NRNA, was not going to happen.

The logic of the argument for dual nationality, as it was commonly presented, did, it is true, have a strong whiff of tautology, since it amounted to saying: 'We should be allowed to keep our Nepali citizenship because we were born Nepali'. Despite assurances, and despite the fact that issues relating to the Nepali diaspora have featured in the manifestos of political parties, many in Nepal's political class were either sceptical or hostile towards the demand for full CNC. A thinly veiled remark from the UML's foreign affairs head, Bhim Rawal, during a visit to London in January 2014, made it plain that all the main political parties were united in not wanting to grant dual citizenship as demanded by the NRNs. He posed four vital questions related to the theoretical and practical implications of accepting dual citizenship by Nepal:

[12] Noted journalists such as Dhurba Hari Adhikari and Kishor Nepal have also written in a critical vein on NRNs and argued against giving them privileges.

[13] These questions were widely discussed by members of the UK's diaspora community following his visit. An online report of his visit stressed his opposition to dual nationality, but did not specifically mention the four questions (NepalBritain 2014).

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> (1) Which side will the people with dual nationalities take if there was a war between two countries that one is citizen of? (2) What will happen [to the national interest] if the person with dual nationality becomes the President of Nepal? (3) If the person gains high position in the secret services of another country what will happen to Nepal? And, (4) by what law can we give dual citizenship to Nepalis living in India?[13]

An intervention in March 2014 by the new Minister for General Administration, Lalbabu Pandit, also from the UML, sparked off an of intense national debate. Pandit was alarmed by the widespread practice of senior public servants maintaining permanent residency of advanced countries while holding an official position in Nepal (for instance, holding official 'indefinite leave to remain' in the UK while still occupying a position as a senior civil servant in Nepal). In Pandit's view this practice is a gross violation of the Civil Service code of conduct and is unpatriotic to boot; he estimated that 1,100 of about 70,000 civil servants in Nepal are guilty of this practice (Pandit 2014). The Nepal Army colonel, Kumar Lama, who was arrested in London in 2013 for his alleged role in violating human rights while in serving at the Gorusinghe barracks in Kapilvastu in 2005 (BBC 2013), was found to have held UK permanent residence documents through his wife, a naturalized British citizen. Pandit argued that the GoN spending 80 million rupees defending Lama's case was a waste of resources as far as Nepal's national interest is concerned. The fact that long-serving career diplomat, Murariraj Sharma, sought political asylum in Ireland in 2009 immediately after he was recalled from his office as the Nepali Ambassador in the UK, is another high-profile example, cited by Pandit, of Nepali public servants failing to be loyal to the nation which has nurtured them. In June 2014 the position taken by Rawal and Pandit was confirmed during the visit to London by the Minister of Information and Communication and leading figure in the Nepali Congress Party, Dr Minendra Rijal.

This form of hyper-nationalist discourse suggests that it is generally a bad thing for the national interest for a Nepali citizen to hold permanent residence of a foreign country even if they do so without being linked to any public position in Nepal. No matter how highly skilled they are, such people may be deemed unsuitable to hold any public position of national interest when they return to Nepal. Thus the UML itself faced criticism for appointing Tara Rai as a member

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of the Constituent Assembly. The controversy was prompted by her alleged possession of Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK, gained through her husband who is a retired Gurkha soldier.

Thus, Minister Pandit's pronouncements spurred a renewed debate, involving both those who have felt compelled to take out foreign nationality and those who have, at considerable inconvenience, resisted doing so (Sharma 2014). There has been a resurgence of what has come to be called 'Lalbabu-nationalism'.[14] This was not the first time that Nepali politicians' strong feelings on the issue of dual nationality leaked out. In 2009 the UML CA member and Chairperson of the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles Committee, Binda Panday, informed the NRNA that only one member in the committee, Gagan Thapa from Nepali Congress, had agreed to sign for the CNC proposal. NRNA officials were shocked and, as a result, intensified their campaign. Politicians and bureaucrats were concerned that legislating for dual citizenship as demanded by the NRNA would eventually invite intractable problems by giving rise to demands for dual citizenship from the millions of people of Nepali origin living within South Asia. Even though there are examples of nation-states giving concessions to their diaspora on a selective basis—such as Pakistan accepting dual citizenship in the case of sixteen specified countries only[15]—policymakers feared that such selective arrangements would eventually backfire.

Many of these concerns, as raised by Bhim Rawal and Lalbabu Pandit, reflect the 'traditional posture of states' that do not promote multiple national identities, that is, the assumption that one can have one and only one nationality (Aleinikoff and Klusmeyer 2001). However, it is clear that worldwide there has in fact been a paradigm shift towards plurality: in making its case, the NRNA claimed that more than 70 countries have already adopted some form of dual nationality policy (NRNA 2010a: 5). There are cases, such as

[14] As Gamlen (2008) points out, many countries have shifted (sometimes precipitously) from an initial view of migrants as deserters or traitors, to migrants as heroes. For the case of New Zealand, see Gamlen (2012).

[15] See www.dgip.gov.pk for the list (nine European countries, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria).

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Sri Lanka, where people with dual nationality have returned and taken ministerial portfolios in the government.

Citizenship is a particularly sensitive issue in Nepal, and has long been so, because of the open border with India and the freedom of movement that the citizens of each country enjoy to live and work in the other country (Gurung 1983). Against these concerns it has been pointed out that Nepal has already adopted a selective approach by not extending the designation of NRN to people living in South Asian countries. India too does not count people of Indian origin settled in other South Asian countries as OCI or PIO. Subedi (2012), a proponent of the CNC agenda, argued that "Any policy of granting dual citizenship should carefully chart out pathways so that this does not apply to citizens of Nepali origin in India or China." He acknowledged the difficulty that India faces in legislating a dual nationality policy due to complexity involving multiple generations of PIOs, but by the same token he argued that, since Nepal's migrations are relatively recent, it would be much easier for the government to consider the CNC. However, while he excluded the whole of South Asia, he apparently did not consider the multigenerational Nepali diaspora communities in Southeast Asia and the Pacific (see Chapters 4–7 in this volume).

It came as something of a surprise, given all this well-documented opposition, that the political parties in fact honoured their commitments to the NRNA when the new constitution was promulgated on 20 September 2015. The following unprecedented clause appeared as Article 14:

> Non-resident Nepali citizenship may be granted: A person who has acquired citizenship of a foreign country and who resides in a country other than a country member of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and who previously himself or herself or his/her father or mother, grandfather or grandmother was a citizen of Nepal by descent or by birth and who later acquired the citizenship of a foreign country may be granted non-resident citizenship of Nepal allowing him/her to enjoy the economic, social and cultural rights as provided for by the federal law. (Constitution 2015: 4)

This new provision (*i*) follows the NRN Act in excluding Nepalis residing in South Asian countries, (*ii*) includes up to three generations, (*iii*) allows all rights other than political rights, and (*iv*) will be implemented through federal law, which will need to be enacted.

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Despite this apparent victory in the fight for dual nationality, the ideas of 'Lalbabu nationalism' have had their impact on the idea of citizenship. The Constitution categorically bars PNOs from participating in Nepal's political process. Furthermore, it goes into considerable detail in order to bar Nepali nationals with permanent residence abroad from being appointed or elected to any public position, unless such a person renounces such residence and stays in Nepal for three months after doing so. Thus, Article 291 has the following provisions:

> Not Eligible for Appointment:
>
> (1) Notwithstanding anything contained elsewhere in this constitution, a Nepali citizen who has obtained permanent residence of a foreign country shall not be eligible for election, nomination, or appointment to any position that this constitution stipulates as requiring election, nomination, or appointment.
> However, there shall be no hindrance to elect, nominate, or appoint such a person to such a position once a period of three months has elapsed from their renunciation of such permanent foreign residence.
> (2) Other provisions concerning the Nepalese citizens who have obtained permanent residence of a foreign country as per clause (1) shall be provided by Federal law. (Constitution 2015: 134)[16]

This additional clause in the constitution, when read in conjunction with Article 14, epitomizes the tensions between the view that promotes migrants as a key resource for development and the opposing view that denounces migrants as traitors or deserters (Gamlen 2008). It is interesting that exactly this tension (hero vs. traitor) has long existed, and been expressed in literary form, in views of Gurkha soldiers (Hutt 1989). Here, as elsewhere, the constitution attempts to chart a compromise course between radically opposed views.

CURRENT AND FUTURE ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES

The NRNA aspires to be the common organization of all Nepalis outside South Asia: not merely one organization among many others,

[16] We have adapted the English translation for readability after consulting the original in Nepali.

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and not just an organization of individuals. Its constitution (2003, with amendment 2013: 6.2) states: "By coordinating Nepali organizations worldwide and establishing a global network, [the NRNA will] represent Non-Resident Nepalis as their common organization" (NRNA 2013a: 3) [translation by the authors]. The NRNA NCC, in those countries with large Nepali populations, does provide a common platform where different Nepali groups and communities, which otherwise might not have the opportunity to do so, can come together and act together.

The NRNA is the largest membership-based Nepali diaspora organization, but it is not the only global organization. There are other organizations of a global nature based on political affiliations in Nepal, on ethnic identity, or on professional or other common interests. Nepal's major political parties have opened branches of their sister organizations within Nepali diaspora communities and so have a worldwide network. For example, the People's Coordination Committee (Janasamparka Samiti) of Nepali Congress, the Progressive Nepali Society of UCPN Maoist, and the Overseas Nepalese Forum (previously Nepalese Democratic Forum) of the CPN-UML. Various ethnic organizations such as Tamu Dhee, Kirat Rai Yayokkha, Kirat Yakthung Chumlung, and Magar Association (Minami 2007) are also found in countries where the relevant Nepali ethnic groups have settled. There are chapters of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) in most of the countries where Nepal's Janajati people live. Many of these organizations are sponsored by parent organizations in Nepal and are in effect branches of it. Thus it is not a question of having a federal or confederal body at the global level. Some organizations have learned from the NRN experience and aspired to become a global federation. For example, some activists of the Newar ethnic community have formed a global association of Newars, called WNO or World Newar Organization, but this is still very far from being a genuine federation of national organizations. There are also several international Nepali literary societies with chapters in many countries.

Thus, the NRNA continues to be the only globally bridging organization of NRNs. Given its open membership, with no restriction on the basis of caste, class, religion, region, or any other identity,

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the NRNA has gained legitimacy as the only common forum of Nepalis everywhere. Yet, though it is expanding in terms of the number of participating nations and size of membership, the NRNA has not quite succeeded in becoming an organization of all NRNs. Only a small fraction (about 1–2 per cent) of the hundreds of thousands of NRNs have actually taken out membership of the organization and many noted individuals have not joined as yet (Lama 2013).

Given the level of costs involved—travel and other—there are barriers for ordinary NRNs to join the NRNA and take leading positions nationally and internationally. This adds to the impression that the NRNA is a 'rich men's club'. This argument is supported by the fact that so far almost all presidents of NRNA have come from the richest diaspora class. The three-time president Upendra Mahato is a Belarussian multimillionaire. Even though his successor Dev Man Hirachan from Japan was less wealthy, he is certainly considerably more affluent than the average NRN. Jiba Lamichhane, from Russia, who succeeded Hirachan, is also a multimillionaire; his successor, Shesh Ghale, is one of the richest Australians. Other not-so-rich, but educated and successful professional people, who aspire to reach high office, often fail to compete with their richer colleagues.

As with many professional organizations within Nepal, elections for the ICC often see candidates running, more or less openly, as representatives of party political groupings. The danger is that the interests of the parties and/or the competing individuals take precedence over the aims of the organization itself. Despite these hiccups, the NRNA has so far managed to stay united and not split into party-aligned organizations, as has happened with many professional and trade union organizations within Nepal.

In a growing number of NCCs, election periods become quite heated and it is the only time when membership recruitment drives are launched. The aspiring candidates for the top job within the NCC mobilize their supporters to recruit new members and offer to pay membership dues themselves. In recent years factional competition between such groups reached such a level in the US and UK that the very spirit of the NRNA as a common organization was threatened. Hangen describes above (Chapter 10) how the US NCC struggles to be

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inclusive. In the UK in 2013 dissenting groups opened a parallel NCC. The election politics in the UK NRNA did not only involve money, but also appeals to political ideology and ethnic sentiments (Luitel 2014). Even though these tensions have been managed to some extent, they still present a real challenge to the coherence and future effectiveness of the NRNA.

If the NRNA were serious about expanding its influence and increasing its relevance to ordinary Nepalis, it would need to find ways to mobilize the enormous number of potential, but so far uninvolved, members, who join, if at all, only episodically at the time of elections. A consequence of this pattern is that there is, for most diaspora Nepalis, a lack of any real sense of belonging in the organization. As well as encouraging greater individual membership, reflective members of the NRNA are aware that they need to work out how it can effectively operate as a bridge or connector between mushrooming community-based organizations (there are more than 400 organizations in the UK alone [CNSUK 2013]).

Another area which, according to some critics, the NRNA needs to work on is the participation of women and youth in general and in its representative bodies in particular. Currently, participation in youth- and women-related activities is token rather than substantive. It is a common feature of most Nepali broad-based representative civil society organizations to have a high representation of men, and the NRNA is no exception. As well as dealing with the issues of youth as a significant section of Nepalis, it is obviously also important for the NRNA to be relevant to the second generation, if it is to survive into the future. The NRNA has been less successful in appealing to those diaspora Nepalis who migrated much earlier to countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, and Fiji. Even though diasporic connections are increasing and new possibilities are opening up, NRNA members have found it a challenge to make their organization relevant to earlier migrants (see Chapter 6 in this volume).

At present the NRNA mostly focuses its activities on Nepal, which comes at the neglect of the welfare of diaspora Nepalis themselves. It has not taken any position on the degree or nature of integration in the mainstream society in their country of domicile, nor attempted to provide its members with services there. In order to recruit and involve potential members, especially the younger generation, the

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NRNA, as it is more thoughtful members realize, needs to focus equally on local issues in the migration destination.

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Despite high expectations and comparatively few achievements, the NRNA has evolved as one of the largest diaspora organizations, and certainly the one with the widest reach and largest ambitions for membership and influence. The NRNA campaigned for dual citizenship and fairly rapidly achieved some gains through the NRN ID card policy stipulated in the NRN Act of 2007. This was followed in 2015 by the constitutional acceptance of the idea of non-resident Nepali citizenship conferring all but political rights.

As an organization that is expanding in terms of members and country chapters, the NRNA faces the challenge of maintaining its organization intact as it expands and copes with the influence of money and politics in its governance. The real potential of the NRNA lies in the mobilization of the vast pool of eligible Nepalis around the world and their community of self-help organizations, many of which have not so far been part of the NRNA. Equally, the diaspora Nepalis who migrated away from Nepal during the colonial period have either not been reached or have not found the NRN movement relevant to their needs. The challenges faced by NRNs in their country of residence is a rather neglected issue, which, if tackled, might prove to be the solution to the problem of mobilizing the resources the NRNA needs to empower Nepalis globally as well as to serve Nepal. Whether the increased privileges promised by the new constitution will help unleash the full potential of NRNA involvement in Nepal's development, and whether indeed ties between the diaspora and Nepal will intensify or diminish over the coming years, is hard to predict.

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19

TAMANG GENDERED SUBJECTIVITIES IN A MIGRATING WORLD

Kathryn S. March

THIS CHAPTER EXPLORES THE CONTINUITIES and transformations wrought in Tamang systems of sex and gender by the recent extensive wage outmigration, mostly of men. That is, it is about what is happening to the material prospects for Tamang men and women, as well as in Tamang constructions of gendered value. Although both men and women are experiencing dramatic experiential changes, the greater challenges to self-worth are confronting women, whether they are left behind in the villages, migrate halfway to live in Kathmandu, or travel themselves to work and live internationally. As these women and men reconfigure their resources—both economic and social—and as they reinterpret what it means to face these changes, the model of Tamang gender—which is animated by reciprocal and mutually complementary obligations—informs their choices and their understandings of them.

The most sweeping strokes of this paper, then, presume to describe the intertwined gendered subjectivities of Tamang men as providers of the basic sustenance for their family line and of Tamang women as generators of future increase, growth, and prosperity, in what I call

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the 'Tamang co-parcener model of gender' as I found it in the 1970s and 80s. Then, the village of Mhanégang, northwest of Kathmandu, was, as David Holmberg (1989)[1] described it (borrowing from Geertz) "involuted" (1963)—closed, involuntarily but self-protectively, upon itself. With the mid-1980s began an explosive out-migration, primarily of men, who, in the case of Mhanégang, because they had largely not participated in the older migrations to India or into the Gurkhas, nor even in the eastern Nepal trekking business, went directly to the Gulf, to Southeast Asia, and beyond. In spite of being the main out-migrants, however, my research suggests that, viewed through the lenses of this Tamang co-parcener model, these Tamang men continued to be able to see what they were doing as valuable in familiar ways, that is, enduring whatever hardships were required to sustain their families, albeit by sending home wage remittances rather than by farming.

It is the women's sense of self that, I will argue, has been most deeply challenged by these changes. Women's experiences of migration can be parsed into three major categories: (*i*) those women left behind in the rural subsistence village with very young children and elderly parents-in-law; (*ii*) those women who moved with school-age children to Kathmandu so that they could enrol in private schools there; and (*iii*) those women who themselves migrated internationally, with or without their husbands.[2] In all three cases, they are no longer doing the kinds of things that their foremothers prepared them for and through which they would have expected to craft a sense of themselves as honourable women. For some, these challenges appear to be too much. Some are, in fact, quite broken and virtually paralyzed by them, confined to rooms in cities and to lives they do not understand, quite miserable. Others have embraced their new lives, whether by becoming virtuoso shoppers, movie-goers, and model mothers or by finding unexpected new adventures and freedoms.

I hope to show how out-migration has had an impact on all aspects of Tamang lives and future, on both Tamang sexed relations and the

[1] To whom my debts are inestimable.

[2] It is possible that this might be two separate categories—(1) those migrating alone and sending remittances back and (2) those migrating with their husbands and children—but their numbers are currently too small to document such a claim.

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Figure 19.1 Biba Tamang and other women and children whose husbands and fathers are working abroad while they live in Kathmandu.

Source: K. March (27 March 2005).

overall system of gender. I will shamelessly appropriate Bourdieu's (1986) framework to describe how migration has transformed the economic, social, and cultural capital of the Western Tamang men and women I know so profoundly that it is the root of the "ontological vulnerability" (Lear 2006: 50) they are facing today. My thesis here is that the gendered subjectivities with which they are facing these challenges are also the very roots of the considerable courage with which they are facing them. The two most important conclusions in this chapter are that:

1. It is Tamang women's subjectivity that is facing a greater challenge than men's, and
2. As men's and women's subjectivities are transforming, two places where their sense of virtuous action converge and build upon prior constructions of Tamang gender are (a) in the education of their children, and (b) in the building of houses.

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SEX AND GENDER: NOT THINGS, BUT WAYS OF SEEING

In presenting this argument, I need, first, to confirm that we understand each other when I speak of 'sex' and 'gender': not merely as glosses for the body, on the one hand, and the cultural constructions thereof, on the other. I hope to convince you that 'gender'—as I will develop the concept (standing unabashedly on the shoulders of many)—is all about reproduction, but only incidentally that which makes babies; rather more importantly, it makes a moral world order, by constituting an antinomy of mutually necessary and interdependent kinds of persons who, by behaving with the honour, virtue, and courage appropriate to their gender, secure the continuity—the reproducibility—of their shared moral order. Moreover, this order shares all the characteristics outlined in Geertz's legendary definition of a religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (2000 [1965]: 90). With one major addendum: gender is that cultural system that makes the religious/moral order (*i*) meaningful for and from both men and women, and (*ii*) specifically addresses the question of reproduction, that is the reproducibility of a valued past into a valorous future.

In the approach I am articulating here, 'sex' and 'gender' are not 'things'. We must not imagine them as nouns, but as processes, as we, in large part, already do with the idea of culture. Instead of being 'of the material body' vs. 'of the cultural mind', 'sex' and 'gender', in the usage I am following here, are 'ways of seeing' or 'ways of knowing'. Not nouns, but gerunds, or adverbs, if you will, which focus our attention on the perspective from which we know and see the world: *how* we know and how we see, not *what*.

And what are the perspectives at stake when we recuperate 'sex' and 'gender' as process, not thing? Here, in many ways, I am merely bricolating two widespread approaches within anthropology—the materialist and the cultural—with the two terms of feminism—sex and gender. What 'sex' becomes, when it is not a biological thing, is that way of understanding what Rubin called "the sex/gender system" (1975) in terms of its impact upon the material conditions

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of life. Gender, in this processual view, becomes that way of understanding this sex/gender system in terms of how it shapes perception, how it classifies and engenders (pun intended) our worlds—how it entangles our desires, how we express or share it, and how it frames who we are as (gendered) persons. Sex and gender as processes, then, are counterpoised analytical approaches which lead us to ask certain counterpoised kinds of questions as different ways of looking at the conjoined sex/gender world.

WHAT IS IT TO GO 'LOOKING FOR SEX'? IN GENERAL, AND IN NEPAL

Looking for sex means asking questions about physical differences and material conditions, answering questions about causality, and analysing historical contingencies and their effects in the 'real' world. Since, in the world, there are physical bodies, actual histories (whether accidental or structural) of lived experiences, joy, suffering, winners and losers, looking to explain how sex operates involves looking at sex-linked material inequities and violences. Looking at reproduction viewed through the lenses of sex is, certainly, about how babies are made, but it is equally, and perhaps more importantly, about other physical and material systems of (re)production: notably, inheritance based on sex, sexual divisions of labour, many aspects of kinship, sex-based politics—all those forces that limit or expand an individual's material opportunities in the real world, based on sex differences.[3]

Looking for sex in Nepal, I want to contrast two systems: Khas-Parbatiya[4] and Tamang. In higher-caste Khas-Parbatiya communities

3 Recognizing, of course, that those differences are not defined the same way everywhere throughout the world.

4 Those of us who work with cultural minorities like the Tamang in Nepal struggle with how to refer to the cultural group that, originating in North-west India and beginning with the hill principality of Gorkha under the military command of Prithvi Narayan Shah, conquered the other principalities throughout the land to establish the modern state of Nepal as a Hindu divine right monarchy dominated by high-caste Nepali-language-speakers. They like to call themselves *Nepali* (or sometimes, in English, Nepalese) but as Lal's published and translated lecture "To be a Nepalese" (2012) elegantly explores,

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in Nepal,[5] it is generally understood that daughters have limited property rights, although they are loved and honoured in their natal homes. Sisters become less and less important to their own birth family over time. In marriage, brides are expected to be virginal (pre-pubertal). Marriage is often in an arranged marriage to relative strangers, who are typically men older than the bride and live some distance away. Brides are expected to move to live with in-laws, who are socially 'superior', immediately. A wife can't divorce or remarry and must reaffiliate within her husband's family. Daughters-in-law

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this usage of *Nepali* erases the cultures of Nepal's many non-Nepali-language speaking (and often non-Hindu, non-caste) cultural communities by subsuming them within the presumptive (and historical) domination of one cultural community. This privileges the hegemony of one group as the normative citizen of Nepal and identifies their culture as national culture, but reduces communities like the Tamang to hyphenated citizenship, for example, Tamang-Nepalis, in ways analogous to Italian-Americans or African-Americans. To recognize the distinctive culture of this dominant community of high-caste Hindus in hill Nepal, without conflating it with these other socially and politically exclusive usages of *Nepali*, Bennett (1983) proposed calling them *Parbatiya*, just slightly differentiating them from the *Pahadi(ya)* used by Berreman (1963) to name the *Hindus of the Himalayas* in his work by the same name. *Khas* is another possible referent for this group in Nepal, since it was their own self-referent and name for their own language prior to their expansion and conquest of Nepal, although today, according to some, *Khas* has acquired some less-than-noble connotations. Some historical sources used *Gurkha/Gorkha* or *Gurkhali/Gorkhali* after their ancestral principality, but this eventually came to refer to those who served in the British or Indian regiments of that name. Lal (2000) proposed *Nepaliya*, but that does not appear to have caught on. In a blunt gesture with particularly nasty overtones, the political leadership in Nepal changed the category of *anya* ('other') to *arya* (no translation necessary): *anya/arya* is—along with Dalit ('untouchable'), Janajati ('ethnic'), Madheshi ('people from Madhesh' or the Tarai), *durgam kshetra* ('backward region')—used by the Election Commission to designate categories relevant to selection of the 335 seats in Parliament elected through proportional representation, in which framework *Anya* consisted mostly of high-caste Hindus. (On the category 'other' and Khas identity, see Adhikari and Gellner 2016b.)

5 My evidence here is secondary (Bennett 1983; Cameron 1995, 1998; and Gray 1995) since I have not done formal research in any such community.

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are expected to work very hard but get little recognition and have little control. If a woman lives long enough, if her husband does not die or reject her, and she has sons who live long enough, mothers and mothers-in-law can expect to be maintained and honoured by their sons and daughters-in-law.

In an almost point-for-point contrast, Tamang women (March 1983, 2002), as daughters, were given their own property (*dzo*), from which they built their own wealth, over which they retained absolute control. Daughters and sisters always remained important to their own birth family and community. They married as adults to husbands close to their own age. Tamang women could (and did) remarry, whether widowed or divorced. Their in-laws, because of cross-cousin marriage, were already especially affectionate kin. They didn't move to their husband's house immediately after marriage; instead, young couples travelled back and forth between each of their parents' houses, sometimes for years, and, in any case, the two houses weren't typically far from one another. Tamang daughters, sisters, wives, daughters-in-law, mothers, and mothers-in-law all worked hard, but they had a say in the work they did and they continued to amass and control their own wealth.

In sum, it seems reasonable to label the material arrangements between the sexes in the Khas-Parbatiya system as one of the protective dependency of women. The household is organized under the authority of a senior man, while women (and other minors) are his dependents. They perform many forms of labour, much (but not all) of which is reproductive (that is, not productive) and almost all of which goes largely unrecognized. They do not control productive resources, although they are expected to be effective husbanders (*sic*) of household resources, especially as they become mothers-in-law.

In the Tamang case, the overall picture is, again, substantially—almost contrapuntally—different. Tamang households were organized under the joint authority of a senior couple, who together represented the house and family in community events, ritually and practically. A household depended upon the property and labour of both sexes. Kin groups at their most ramifying are represented by brothers and sisters. In some contexts, such as first haircutting, this was literally the joint responsibility of a sister as the boy's mother and her brother as his mother's brother. In other contexts, such as mortuary feasts,

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groups of clan sisters collectively provided and lit the 108 butter lamps to light a clan brother's way to a better rebirth. I have provisionally termed this Tamang arrangement (borrowing and expanding upon the legal concept of joint inheritance) a co-parcener model.

WHAT IS IT TO GO 'LOOKING FOR GENDER'?

Returning to my initial observation that we can look at systems either from the perspective of sex or of gender, that is, either to highlight material arrangements between (or among) the sexes, or to explore how those systems make life meaningful, the world moral, and persons honourable, by gendering them, respectively. Looking for gender means paying attention to representations, answering questions about meaning, and analysing internal logics of differentiation within the full system of sex/gender. This point of view does not deny the palpable bumps and grinding of material sexed experiences; it simply is not focusing upon them. Instead, it looks at the logics and processes of representation, opposition (even of the binary sort), inversion, anomaly, antinomy, hope, fear, and desire. Viewed through the lenses of gender, as well, we are more likely to envision change as also dependent upon what feminists in the 1960s called 'consciousness' and tried to 'raise' as an essential instrument of change. Again, this is not to deny the need for economic, political, or legal reform, but it recognizes that change can sometimes occur, even in the face of great physical obstacles, when people have ideas about change, in the case of sex/gender, the ability to imagine and capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004), in this case, to mutual respect, equity, and social justice for both sexes.

Reproduction, viewed from the perspective of gender, is of a moral world order, with its promise of continuity and adaptability, not simply of babies. This, ultimately, is the true promise and power of gender: to offer a knowable world that will reproduce itself, apparently without change or end. But here's the rub: what one way of knowing giveth, another taketh away. This is the antinomy of gender (March 1983, 1998): it simultaneously envisions mutually exclusive but interdependent moral orders by embodying each in a sex, with each sex, in effect, showing, seeing, and saying (to the extent that they behave honourably), 'This is how the world should look', with each viewpoint

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the counterpoint to the other in such a way that the doubts of both are answered by the (questioned) assertions of another.

My debts here are clear to those who have developed what has come to be known as situated knowledge (Haraway 1991) and standpoint theory (Harding 2004), along with ideas about epistemic privilege (Narayan 1989). What I wish to add to this discussion is an observation about the distinctive power of gender: the knowledge situated by gender organizes nothing less than the knowable positions (no pun intended) involved in the reproduction of the known world; the gendered subjectivities of the sexes motivate an antinomic exchange in which the perspectival energies of both (all?) are necessary to secure continuity in their carefully choreographed, if not precisely shared, world. In one early formulation of Western gender (Sokoloff 1980), for example, men are expected to work producing things of value in the market, and women to labour without compensation at home (and to 'labour' in childbirth). The antinomic virtues of money and love engender both men's and women's subjectivities, motivating and inflecting their actions with meaning. For each assertion, as it were, that 'love makes the world go round' another viewpoint is equally roundly voiced, 'It's the economy, stupid'. A structurally similar gendered opposition—although totally different in content—lies in Weiner's (1976) "value" and "renown".

In the case of sex and gender in Nepal, I can say nothing more about the Khas-Parbatiya other than to assert that specific constructions both of sexed political economy and of gendered subjectivity lie at the fulcrum of their protective dependency model, that these constructions drive their ideas about what (re)produces their world as they see, know, and live in it.

TAMANG GENDERED SUBJECTIVITIES

In the Mhanégang I knew from the 1970s and 80s, men inherited land, houses, and animals, especially for traction. Theirs were the resources that fed and sheltered their families. They married and provided the 'bone' for the bodies of the children in their patriline. Their sons, in turn, inherited, worked, married, and passed that land, houses and 'bone' on down through continuous generations. The honour of Tamang men is structurally analogous to what Annette Wiener

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called the 'renown' of Trobriand men (1976) and what Lear called the 'courage'/'virtue' of Crow warriors (2006), although it differs in the specificity of its content. In the Tamang case, male honour stemmed from men's ability to ensure the lineal continuity of their world by providing the basic subsistence support and 'bone' for their families and it required considerable *wang* (Tamang 'power') to achieve this.

By contrast, women received jewelry, grain, animals for meat and milk, looms, money, and a range of bronze/brass/copper plates and vessels. They worked hard with their men in the fields, but did not plough, and, above all, were especially valorous if they made their families' and their own property increase through skilful management and marketing. The 'flesh' of their children's bodies came from their mothers, whose 'milk' was the trail along which they grew. The honour, value (Wiener 1976), or courage (Lear 2006) of women lay in their ability to make the resources under their guardianship fertile, prosperous, and ever increasing, whether by the entrepreneurial investment of their property for profit or the fertility of their herds. As I have argued elsewhere (March 1987, 1998) this generative capacity to produce all kinds of *yang* (Tamang 'increase')—*nhor-gi yang* ('the increase of money-wealth'), *bru-i hong* ('the increase of grains'), *shye-ki chyut* ('the increase in all things'), *chhelam-bulam* ('sons-daughters')—this was the *tasyi* ('blessing' 'good fortune') that the hand of a woman brought into the families and houses they created with their husbands.

Just as Tamang would say that a house's *tasyi* lay in the hands of its women, especially its most senior woman, the ability to (re)produce these generative blessings on a larger scale also lay in the 'hands of beloved women', as the refrain of the *Ya hwai* or 'Hand Song'—one of the most important religious songs about the origin of the world—proclaims. In village rituals, it was (and I believe still is) women who place the offerings to the lamas and the Buddhas and it is their gendered valour that imbues those offerings with the *tasyi* to induce the divine to share its *wang* with mortals. Without *wang* a headman cannot lead, a person cannot do what must be done, and the social order would collapse.

Here, of course, my argument must be embellished a bit and in ways that are awkward to do in English. What is interesting about women and men, and about female-marked *yang*-increase and male-marked *wang*-power, is that you must be very clear about the

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difference between sex and gender. When I say that it is women who bring *yang*-increase into their families and houses, it is not just anyone in a woman's body who can do this; it must be a person whose subjectivity is striving (in Lear's words, intending, desiring, hoping ...) to have a woman's courage to act, to aspire to a woman's virtue. In fact, these concepts of female courage, female virtue, and female honour, in the specifically Tamang subjectivity constituted by female-marked *tasyi*-blessings and female-marked *yang*-increases, inhere to a gendered subjectivity—a gendered way of seeing yourself in the world that inspires you to act in particular, and particularly meaningful, ways—almost more than they do to a specifically sexed body.

Although Tamang understandings of *tasyi*-blessing, *yang*-increase, and *wang*-power are decidedly gendered, their relationship to people of sex is more complicated. First, you must understand that persons of a particular sexed body are not deterministically enjoined only to enact the gender of their body. A person in a man's body can, and often does, act in female-marked ways: a Tamang man can, for example, make offerings or serve beer, holding his hands in that way that asks for *tasyi*-blessings and *yang*-increases—with the right hand extended and the left, touching the right elbow. But, second: and, when he does, he is not compromising his male embodiment because his understanding of the female modus operandi does not make him a woman; it, more importantly, shows the depth of his understanding of both gendered ways of seeing the world. Finally, this recombinant motility of sex and gender means that the actions associated with each gender in some sense acquire greater significance when a person of the 'right' sex performs them, not that only people of the right sex can or must perform them. Recall that neither subjectivity nor gender are things in a physical world: rather, they position persons in ways that constitute (in Lear's terms) a point of view, a location in a conceptual world; they are ways of seeing, looking, and acting.

When the headmanship of Mhanégang is legitimated in a confirmation ritual at which he is offered a turban in the name of his collective clan sisters, he is accepting to enact with courage that male-marked position of *wang*-power. As headman, he can aspire to achieving that "standard of excellence" in part because his male headman subjectivity is intertwined with his sisterly ones in ways that make displays like this publically embody the male virtues of stability, authority,

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and lineal continuity. The female subjectivity of the clan sisters is predicated upon a perspectival antinomy, which sees the generative source of social power, not in lineal continuity, but in exchange, especially in marital and textile exchange. Or the exchange of beer, which is the power and purpose of the 'trail beer'. As a drink, offered to community members, just at the moment they leave the village, the beer—because it is offered from the point of view of Tamang female subjectivity—will create a powerful desire—a 'mood and motivation' to return to Geertz (2000 [1965])—even need, to return to the village later, to reciprocate. If, as Lear stated, "[c]ourage is a state of character that is manifested in a committed form of living" (2006: 65), the courage of Tamang men and women lies in their shared commitment to a form of living in which each gendered subjectivity is envisioned as conceptually interdependent upon the virtue of other.

Figure 19.2 Setar Tamang with *lam chhang* or 'trail beer' offered so that those leaving the village will feel obliged to return.

Source: D. Holmberg/K. (March 1977).

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Figure 19.3 Lalbir Tamang, village headman. His 'turban of office' is given in the name of his clan sisters in the village to legitimate and confirm him.

Source: D. Holmberg (1976).

ENTER WAGED OUT-MIGRATION

The greatest challenge to Tamang gendered valour, and the subjectivities and courage dependent upon it, and, ultimately, to the Tamang moral and religious order, is the out-migration into wage labour that began evacuating the village after the late 1980s. When David Holmberg and I lived in Mhanégang 40+ years ago, less than 3 per cent of the population had migrated out, and none overseas. By 2006, 35 per cent of the total village population had migrated out, with 13 per cent going overseas. And these numbers have remained relatively stable since.

This situation is not unique to Mhanégang. All studies of population and migration in Nepal show the numbers of out-migrants

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trending steeply upward. The preliminary report on the 2011 national census from the Central Bureau of Statistics found 1,917,903 'absentees' in the population, that is, people living abroad, twice the number abroad even just in 2001. Furthermore, the CBS deduced from the sex breakdown of the overall population, that most of these were male. In Mhanégang, as well, the overwhelming majority of these out-migrants were men, due largely to national foreign labour regulations,[6] this has meant that roughly two thirds of the working-age males were absent. This has left two thirds of the women behind in the village, where upwards of 40 per cent of the households came to be headed by women (almost twice the national average). Another 25 per cent of the women had moved with their children in secondary migration to Kathmandu. Unlike many other reported patterns of women's entry into factory or pink collar work (Ong 1987; Salaff 1981), few Tamang women who have left the village to date have left to find paid work.

Some aspects of Mhanégang migration are, however, worth noting. First and foremost is that Mhanégang entered the world of wage labour relatively late. Unlike some of the other communities today heavily out-migrated and dependent upon remittances, Tamang men were not recruited into the historically noteworthy forms of foreign labour, such as the British or Indian Gurkhas.[7] Because of the corvée labour obligations tying Western Tamang to their farming communities (Holmberg et al. 1994) as well, men from this region also could not often take advantage of the open border with India to seek employment there,[8] although, as land pressures mounted through

6 See especially Sijapati and Limbu's excellent review of Nepal national policies and practices regulating migrant labour (2012).

7 Tamang regularly claim that they were forbidden to compete for places in the British Gurkhas, a claim that is certainly upheld by the relative rarity of their recruitment and by the relative invisibility of those who did serve, who typically represented themselves as other than 'Tamang', calling themselves something else, notably 'Ghale', who are also found among the Gurung, or 'Lama', who could be Gurung, Sherpa, or others. Only two Mhanégang men served: one in the Nepal Army military band; one in the Indian Army.

8 While there may be some young Mhanégang villagers who ran off to India and thereby vanished from our detailed genealogies, there are only two such well-documented cases.

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the 1970–80s, more and more men migrated out of the village to work in the slack agricultural season. They usually worked in road construction: they rarely contributed significant income to their households; what they importantly did was to make their bodies available to work during the agricultural season, but take their mouths out of the village the rest of the year; this helped balance the people-to-land/food ratio significantly.

Before I discuss what is happening to Tamang sexed relations and gendered subjectivities in detail, I have a confession: when I first began this research, I thought understanding out-migration would involve sorting out the 'push' and 'pull' factors. I found no such ambiguity: it was the poverty, *tout court*, that drove them out. In my interviews, every single respondent said more or less what this woman and her family said: "If there'd been enough, we would have stayed [in the village]." "No matter what we did. We'd work for 6 months and still it wouldn't be enough food. Hail, floods, landslides. ..." "We'd say, 'We need to sell some grain; we need some money'. But there wasn't enough grain even to eat."

Eighty per cent of all Mhanégang households have less than the 10 *ropani*s of land that all sources—the World Bank (2011), the Nepal Living Standards Survey, and the villagers themselves—said was the minimum to feed a family of four.[9] And that's just to feed, and barely clothe. Not send to school, or buy medicines, or pay for electricity. And so they left.

As in many other reports on historical migrations, the poorest households in Mhanégang are more likely to send all their members out (and in this case, they are the most likely to send members to India). Poor modest households are most likely to send members overseas into wage labour, where the costs of negotiating through manpower agencies are far from trivial. And the wealthiest households in Mhanégang were most likely to migrate only to other parts of Nepal, particularly Kathmandu, and particularly for education and better employment, not the kinds of gruelling physical labour typically

9 By way of comparison, the Tom Quad at Oxford is about 12.5 *ropani*—more than 'enough' for a family. And with the usual inflated expansiveness of the Americas, both the Harvard Yard and the Cornell Arts Quad are each about 80 *ropani*—'enough' for eight families.

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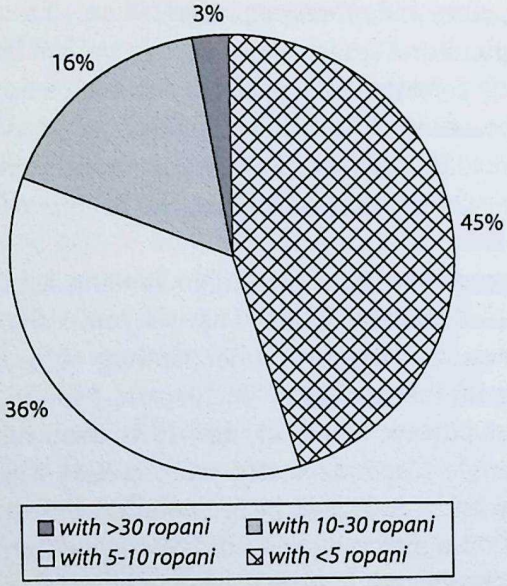

Figure 19.4 Distribution of land per household in Mhanégang.

Source: Author field survey.

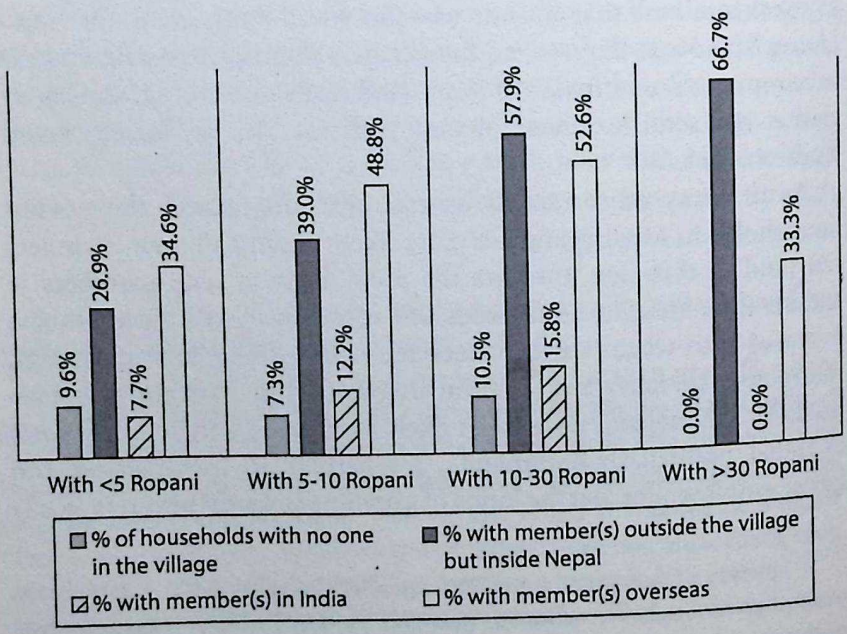

Figure 19.5 Landholding and Migration in Mhanégang.

Source: Author field survey.

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found in the Gulf and Malaysia, the two most common destinations for out-migrants from Mhanégang overall.

Many of the other usual processes found in migration studies are operative for Mhanégang migrants (and deserve a longer paper): chain migration has resulted in odd clusters of Mhanégang villagers in places like the UAE and Malaysia above all; almost all migration is negotiated through manpower agencies and is subject to national foreign employment regulations; and secondary migration has pulled a substantial number of women into Kathmandu.

The transformations produced in Mhanégang by this sudden and extensive departure of so many of its young and adult men are dramatic. In the next sections of this paper, I want to describe the impact of this out-migration (with a shamelessly transparent appropriation of Bourdieu's [1986] framework) on economic, social, and cultural capital, and relate those impacts to that on the gendered subjectivities of Tamang men and women, in order to demonstrate just how profound is the "ontological vulnerability" (Lear 2006: 50) they are facing today. And I hope also to demonstrate, not only the courage with which they are facing these challenges to their virtue, but also that—while much of the content of the Tamang definition of male and, especially, female virtue is changing radically—the commitment to the co-parcener model seems to be holding firm; indeed, it may be the very rudder guiding their voyage through these stormy times.

THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON TAMANG SEXED RELATIONS

According to Bourdieu (1986), the three forms of capital are economic, social, and cultural; all are undergoing intense and rapid change in the context of Nepalese emigration. In what follows I will divide my discussion of his three forms to highlight the impacts of changes in material, economic, and social conditions for the sexes first, before I look at what is happening to the Tamang culture of gender. It is easiest to point to the changes in economic capital available to Tamang men and women, so that is where I will begin.

The latest National Living Standards Survey (NLSS 2011a, 2011b) reports that the number of households receiving remittances from abroad has increased from 23 per cent to 56 per cent. According to

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the Nepal National Living Standards Survey (NLSS), there has been "significant change in the past 15 years in the composition of income sources: the share of farm income in total income has declined from 61% to 28% while that of non-farm income increased from 22% to 37% and that of other sources including remittances has increased from 16% to 35%." According to the World Bank, remittances as a percentage of GDP have increased from 1 per cent in 1996 to 22.3 per cent in 2011 to 32.2 per cent in 2015.[10]

Moreover, all these figures are universally acknowledged to be serious underestimates. For the most part, remittance research can only document funds coming through formal, public or private, legal channels, but other channels, like *hundi*[11] clearly carry considerable amounts of money, although estimates vary widely in terms of what percentage of the money coming into Nepal comes in through these non-formal channels; most agree that official estimates are low (Graner and Gurung 2003; Seddon et al. 2001). In their study comparing national figures from the 2001 census/NLSS findings with their own 2003 case study work, Kollmair et al. (2006) found that the figures for numbers of out-migrants differed by only 1.5 per cent, but their estimates for remittances were significantly higher. The government estimated remittances of NRs 35.6 billion in 2003: Graner and Seddon (2004) put it at between 40–42 billion; Kollmair et al. (2006: 156) put the amount at 44 billion (between 31.9–62.7), "a sum nearly doubling all the foreign aid (multilateral and bilateral grants and loans) to Nepal (23.7 billion NRs) in the same year".

All this money is creating new forms of wealth. Although Nepal is today often counted among the poorest nations in the world, it has had at least two moments of global economic prominence.

[10] See data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=NP. Accessed on 6 September 2016.

[11] A widespread system for bringing money into the country: businessmen and others who need foreign currency (which is not readily available, especially not in large amounts) go through intermediaries who bundle the monies earned by Nepal nationals abroad (who need Nepalese rupees for their families in Nepal); the former get convertible currencies and the latter get money delivered to family in Nepal at lower rates than the money transfer or formal banking channels.

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First, during the height of the Malla kingdoms in the Kathmandu Valley in the fourteenth–mid-eighteenth centuries CE, when the mercantile prosperity of the China-India-Persia trade produced some of the finest arts, architecture, culture, and urban living found anywhere in the world of that time. Since the rise of the Nepal state, and especially during the Rana regime from 1846/7 to 1950/1 CE, as well, there have been pockets of substantial wealth in the hands of a few families. When Singha Darbar was built by Chandra Shamsher Rana in 1903, for example, it cost (then) NRs 2.5 million. With 1,700 rooms and a staff of 1,500, it was reported to be the largest and most lavish private residence (then) in Asia. The familialism and isolationism of this earlier extractive wealth as well as the combination of entrepreneurship and government-sanctioned privilege that it has morphed into in today's kleptocracy is well known. What is less well known is how (or whether) these early forms of wealth have transformed along elite transnational pathways like those described by Ong (1999, 2003), how entangled it is in development practice (Rankin 2004), or whether it is remaining mostly within Nepal, although to the extent that it does remain in Nepal, it must feed itself upon itself, like a great self-cannibalizing ouroboros, which is certainly no trivial disincentive to local investment. All that Mhanégang villagers know about these forms of wealth is that they have access to none of it, even though it was their labour that produced much of it.

Absolutely new in the economic lives of the people of Nepal, although still largely inaccessible to people in the Mhanégang region, has been the emergence of urban middle and professional classes, many of whose wealth was not primarily descendant from that of the earlier elite families, although they may have had minor family and/or retainer ties with them. Instead, these new forms of wealth were very much tied to the foreign powers who arrived in the country after the fall of the Ranas. The new embassies and aid missions employed large numbers of the recently educated. As the development and tourist industries flourished in Nepal, so too did consumerism. Especially after the political reforms of 1990, and fuelled by the ever-growing influx of foreign-earned remittances, consumer goods, like TVs, refrigerators, cars, and Western clothes, all became new and desired forms of wealth, as described by Liechty (2003) as 'fashion', to which even villagers like those in Mhanégang were not immune. When

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David Holmberg and I worked in Mhanégang in the mid-1970s, there was one radio in the entire village: it ran on batteries (when they were available); it received only Radio Nepal (which was the only station in the country); it broadcast only in Nepali (which was understood by only a few people in the community). Today[12] nearly every house has a radio, most have televisions with video players, most young people have memory sticks full of music which can be played on locally available sound systems, and, as in the country as a whole, there are more cell phones than toilets.

Above all, however, Mhanégang migrants' new wealth has built houses.[13] As big as possible, of reinforced concrete and brick, boxy, alternately ornate and raw, often, as one architect/engineer described them to me, "hopefully optimistic" because of the exposed rebar poking out of the top in anticipation of yet another storey. And unimaginably expensive. Especially in price-to-income ratios, real estate in Kathmandu today rivals in cost the most expensive urban markets in the world. Building these houses in Nepal not only requires hundreds of thousands of rupees, but it consumes the nearly full-time supervision of the home owners. These houses are not as absurdly or exclusively for show as the elaborate, but empty, "skyscrapers" Ballard describes (2004: 45–6) being built by migrants from Mirpur, Pakistan. But they are nonetheless no small mystery, even though there are admittedly very few other investment opportunities for migrants in Nepal. First of all is the question of where that much money comes from. Kollmair et al. (2006) estimated the individual annual remittances coming from various global locations, including the two main destinations for Mhanégang villagers. Even at their estimates of NRs 90,000 on average per migrant per year from the Gulf and NRs 100,000 from Malaysia, it is hard to see how they amass enough capital on the 2–3 year contracts they typically get to build the houses that can cost NRs 3,500,000 even in the village, especially with the other inroads into their income, notably fees to manpower agencies (Kunreuther 2006) and children's schools (see below), to say nothing of the ever-rising costs of living in Nepal, especially Kathmandu.

[12] Although the 2015 earthquakes destroyed much of this new wealth.

[13] And I believe this is probably true for most migrants, at least as an aspiration.

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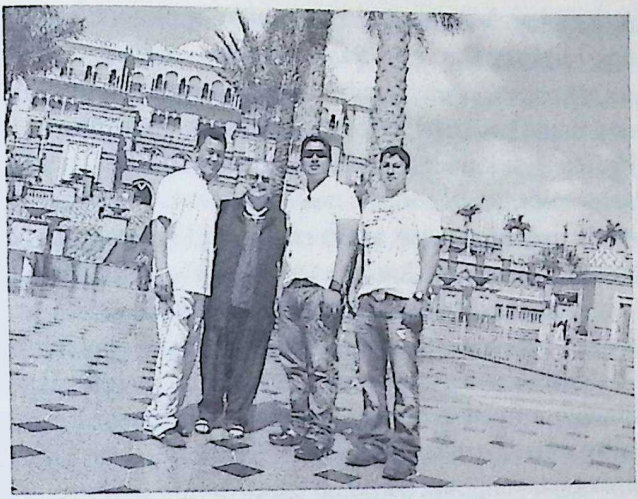

Figure 19.6 Tamang men from Nuwakot (with KSM) at the UAE Dubai Royal Palace, where one works in the security forces.

Source: K. March (14 February 2011).

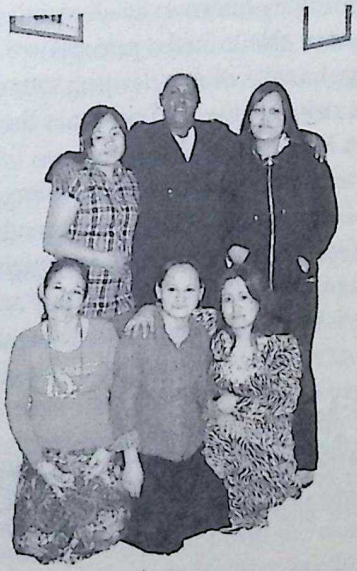

Figure 19.7 Nuwakot and Rasuwa Tamang women with their Kenyan house mother and keeper at their Ladies Camp, UAE.

Source: K. March (14 February 2011).

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Most lucrative for Mhanégang out-migrant men is foreign guard or military service. The very lucky few have found their way into the elite private service of sheikhs in the United Arab Emirates, but, as they have found positions for brothers, cousins, and sons, each new arrival is likely to land less and less attractive posts—guarding less elite households, malls, or prisons—where compensation is much less and, in one man's case, hasn't come at all for at least two years, but he stays in the hope that he will ultimately be paid all his back wages. At least one parlayed his guard service in the Gulf into service in Afghanistan, where Nepalese workers are not supposed be[14] and where they are exposed to extremely dangerous situations.[15] But the pay, although a fraction of that given to Europeans and Americans in combat zones, is inarguably the largest earned by any current Mhanégang out-migrant, making monthly remittances of up to $1,500–2,000 possible. Among the many fewer women who have found wealth by migrating out, most lucrative has been work in elder care in Israel, where some have been working for as many as nine years, saving or sending home approximately $1,000 per month. Even those who went into highly controversial domestic service in the Gulf or Southeast Asia were able to make palpable contributions to their families' well-being. In spite of popular perceptions that all Tamang women are at great risk of being trafficked into the sex trade, not one woman or girl from Mhanégang has.

Not all out-migrants find wealth, however. Many die, including one young man from Mhanégang, in Malaysia, although it must be noted that at least one also died in the village in roughly the same time frame.[16] Increasing numbers are not finding very secure or remunerative positions abroad. Some return without having made even enough

[14] He is no longer there.

[15] As evidenced in the high-profile deaths of 12 (one dramatically beheaded and 11 shot) in Iraq in 2004 and continuing to the 2016 deaths in a suicide bombing of 14 security guards working for the Canadian government in Afghanistan.

[16] According to the Nepal Embassy in Qatar, cited at a fact-checking site available at: blogs.channel4.com/factcheck/factcheck-migrant-workers-dying-qatar/20977, in 2012 and 2013 there were 186 and 197 deaths of Nepalese nationals, respectively.

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to pay off the debts they incurred in going abroad, or only just enough to do so. Many seem to be bouncing from one country to another in search of better opportunities. Their routes are complicated—to the USA via Mexico, to Afghanistan via Jordan and the UAE, to the UK via Portugal—and not always successful, but always fraught with the anxious pursuit of rumours about possibilities and by the police chasing illegals. It seems likely that increasing numbers of migrants will, as one already has, essentially vanish, unable to find employment anywhere, and, unable to send remittances home, he had been contacting family less and less frequently, until contact ceased, although rumours about his whereabouts continue to circulate on social media.

For the women left behind, the relative success or lack thereof of husbands is the key, over which they have very little control, to their own happiness. Those whose husbands are able to send money predictably can be very comfortable. But at least one Mhanégang woman is essentially a migration widow with no contact and no money having come in some time. And others are doubly jeopardized: first, by many out-migrants' inability to earn enough to support their families fully and, second, by Nepalese laws limiting women's access to legal foreign employment. Together this pushes many women into illegal and dangerous work as 'mules'. These women contract with a *sahu* ('employer') to fly to foreign destinations once or twice a month, with luggage containing they know not what, and have to be gone only for a few days. The sahu pays for their travel and puts them up with confederates at the foreign destination; their baggage is provided already locked by the sahu, sometimes including the hand luggage. In one woman's case, this work earned her in 4–6 days almost three times her husband's wages for 12-hour days as a watchman in Kathmandu; together their incomes were just sufficient to pay rent, school fees, and buy food. The daughter of one Mhanégang woman served five years in the Central Jail. She says she still doesn't know what was in the bags she was carrying. Another has now stopped carrying goods to and from Hong Kong but tells of the times she wore five pairs of pants and forty sarongs—so many that she "couldn't fit into the seat or go to the bathroom" because selling these in Kathmandu brought her additional income. But, she said, "it was OK; the pee couldn't make it out through all those clothes!"

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The impact of foreign employment also shaped what Bourdieu (1986) called social capital—that web of networks and relationships through which people find not only the resources to live but also the emotional support to thrive. Levitt's (2001) account of what she calls "social remittances" is directly applicable to the new Nepalese migrants—as people acquired new social networks and relationships, beyond the traditional boundaries of family, caste, ethnicity, and language. With these ties came new ways of imagining social life. In some communities, such as those with longer histories of service in the British Gurkhas, villages to which those who had served outside returned were changed because of what they had seen and learned: they built schools, improved trails and sanitation, and aspired to access better health services; they established new forms of community self-help organizations and they sought to better themselves, even without the support of the central government. Evidence of Levitt's "local-level, migration-driven form(s) of cultural diffusion" can be found everywhere in Nepal, including Mhanégang today in "the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities" (1998: 926).

Preeminent almost *in extremis* among these social transformations is the absolute globalization of the social networks of villagers themselves. At one level, this seems like such a self-evident statement that it can be overlooked. In 1975, the social world of Mhanégang was the village, which even physically and ritually closed itself off to outsiders for the performance of its most important dance drama festival Chhechu (Holmberg 2000, 2016) and was almost entirely circumscribed by the ritual gates to the village territory. To the extent that social networks went beyond the village, they almost exclusively followed ties based in kinship and marriage. Other identities based on clan and ethnicity are gaining greater and changing significance: in the 1970s these governed marriage above all; today they figure as largely in the (re)definition and circulation of what it means to be Tamang in the light of the new ethnic pride politics. These traditional and reformulated traditional ties have expanded widely to embrace connections made at school and work with many more far-reaching kinds of people: different ethnicities and castes from throughout Nepal, as well as from throughout the world.

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As we wrote in *Mutual Regards* (Holmberg et al. 1994: 83), in this more involuted village

> ... the world could not be populated with general types. It was taken for granted that each knew all, and their fathers and mothers, their sons and daughters, their comings and goings, their accomplishments and fancies ... So much so that, after Bhim and Surya Man[17] came out from that Washington D.C. nightclub, where women danced naked on a stage, it did not seem possible that no one would recognize them or care who they were or where they had been. What would have been to us a big city street full of nameless strangers, who could have cared not at all what we had been doing, is in Surya Man's and Bhim's writing still a village full of people who see, know, care ...

In those days, the very idea that someone was unknown seemed remote. Today, people have to work much harder to find the village, kin, marital, clan, ethnic, or national logic to a new connection; and, sometimes, they find themselves deeply connected to people who share none of those logics with them. Entirely new social networks and formations are being forged.

Among the more recent out-migrants and their families from Mhanégang, for example, new kinds of households have formed. Some of these—like the large number of woman-headed households—were involuntary, but even these required members to rethink family relationships as elderly parents and parents-in-law had to continue to work much longer and in much more demanding labours than they would have had if their sons and husbands hadn't left. In Mhanégang, about one third of all occupied houses in the village have been headed by women since 2006. This is almost twice the national average. At least a few of the women who migrated to Kathmandu when their husbands went abroad formed even more distinctively new types of households: in one notable case, for example, a sister, who had been among the first to migrate out and who had subsequently underwritten the out-migration/manpower agency costs of all three of her brothers, lived in a newly extended household comprised of all her brothers' wives and their children. Because the three brothers manage to send substantial money home, together, their sister and their wives shared

[17] The two Tamang co-authors of *Mutual Regards*: Bhim Bahadur Tamang and Surya Man Tamang.

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domestic work and child care, pooled resources, and created new possibilities for each other to continue in school, work, and enjoy leisure time together. One has successfully completed a Master's and then a Law degree.

Most notable among the changes of these new social relationships is the relatively larger number of conjugal and nuclear households, especially among those who have managed to migrate to Europe and the USA. Although even the traditional Tamang marriages I saw in the 1970s were often very companionate, and, as I have described already, husbands and wives constituted corporate units for many social, political, economic, and religious undertakings, even those who lived in nuclear households after brothers divided the patrimonial estate, lived in hamlets and villages full of kin. Men always had brothers and clan-brothers, as well as in-laws, close to hand and women's lifelong ties with sisters, clan-sisters, brothers, and clan-brothers animated their daily and ceremonial life richly. Parenting was widely shared, with grandparents often arguably more involved with raising their grandchildren than they had been with their own children.

Many of these extended relations have been recreated among the secondary migrants to Kathmandu, albeit with fewer men involved, but overseas migrants' marriages are different: they are either widely separated with familial visits only every 2–3 years, or they are intensely nucleated with husband, wife, and children living together abroad but, except for the remarkable growth of social media, cell phones, and computer-assisted communication, they are otherwise physically cut off from wider family; often, the same marriages are both of these off and on, as the spouses find and lose work, or travel abroad separately and together alternately. Such marriages have a new intensity, as couples and their children variously grapple with extremes of separation alternating with extremes of nucleation.

THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON THE CULTURAL SYSTEM OF TAMANG GENDER

The final form of capital described by Bourdieu (1986)—cultural—is, in all three of the "states" he outlines, observable in the experience of the Mhanégang out-migrants and their families. It is in the discussion of these new forms of cultural capital that I want to more specifically

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trace the changes in Tamang gender as an ideational system. In what I have discussed already about the economic and social impact of migration, it should be clear that Tamang life for those who were very young children (or not yet born) when David Holmberg and I did our original research is more radically different from the lives of their parents than their parents' lives were different from their parents. I want in what follows to point to some of the richer divergences and continuities.

Notable among what Bourdieu has called 'embodied' forms of cultural capital are all the emerging *habitus* through which Tamang engage with one another in newly embodied ways: travel, language, and 'love'. It goes without saying that out-migration is a form of travel, but it has brought with it new desires to experience travel in and for itself. Mhanégang residents have always travelled to some extent, to Tibet to trade for salt, to Kathmandu to trade for everything else or to transport their many historical labour obligations (Holmberg, March, and Tamang 1999). Today they travel throughout the world. In their shared accounts of visiting Niagara Falls, San Francisco, New York, or Washington DC (Holmberg et al. 1994), as well as of the Burj Khalifa in the UAE or any number of global sights, they are crafting new selves as global tourists.

The experience of travel, of adventure, has grown as an important form of cultural capital. One Mhanégang woman named for the day of her birth, 'Thursday', who came from an extremely precarious economic background, is flourishing in a new life in the USA with her husband and two sons. Her story is one of almost unrelenting suffering before migration and literacy. Her father left the family before she was born and her mother died when she was not yet two. She survived only because her grandmother was still able to nurse her. When her grandmother died and she encountered further hardships trying to live with a married brother, she ran away to Kathmandu. As a young teenager, she was befriended (and employed as a nanny) by a woman who took her to France, after which she returned to Nepal, learned to read, opened a shelter for other orphaned children, and married a young man whose own story was also full of hardships. Although he could already read and write, she says she told him he should travel the world a little, like she did, before they settled down: "At that time [before travelling to France] I was like *blind* [using the English word].

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I couldn't see anything. ... When I began to see the A-B-C everywhere, on signs, everywhere, it was like my eyes were suddenly opened. ... I told my old man, 'You should go abroad.' ... At that time you could get a 6-month visa for America ... I said, 'You should go. You learn many many things in foreign countries. ... It's not a question of earning money; there's the *experience*'" [again, using the English word].

Prominent among post-migration Tamang is the learning of new languages, notably Nepali and English, but also Hindi, Malay, and, some, Arabic. Today nearly all Mhanégang villagers—both men and women—can speak Nepali, while only a few could in 1975. From popular television programming, many Tamang, even in the village, have cobbled together a passing, if passive, comprehension of Hindi. The success of one Mhanégang man's trekking and tourism business comes largely from wealthy Malaysians and is built on his abilities in Malay and English as much as on his other personal and business skills. Migrants to the Gulf States acquire varying levels of Arabic, dependent upon the extent of their contact with locals, which is sometimes quite heavily regulated and, even, segregated.[18] English, too, is increasingly studied and desired by Mhanégang youth. It is taught as a subject in even the primary grades and becomes the medium of instruction for many in secondary and post-secondary schooling. By demonstrating command of these languages, they are not just opening up new economic or social opportunities, they are fashioning identities not as 'dumb' (*lato*), 'rural' (*gauko*), 'simple' (*sojho*) bumpkins—which was universally the stereotype (and, to some extent still is) of ethnic Tamang[19] but as cosmopolitan citizens of a much wider world.

[18] An interesting question, far beyond the scope of either this chapter or my present research, is what impact Muslim dominance in the primary migratory destinations for Mhanégang men has had on their understanding of global/modern gender relations.

[19] To be 'dumb' has the same double sense in Nepali of being both unable to speak and stupid. To be 'rural' implies unworldly and backward, although it can also be somewhat romanticized. *Sojho*, which I have here translated as 'simple', is both a character failing and a strength because, on the one hand, it implies being gullible or easily tricked, while, on the other, indicating an admirable honesty, reliability, and loyalty.

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Of special importance, and not just to Tamang, is the apparent rise in 'love' marriage, too. When David and I were first in Mhanégang, even though Tamang could and did divorce and remarry so that it was clear that spouses both had an active say in their marriages, it was largely the case, as an older woman Jyomo once explained to me, that, "in America, you take pride in being able to say that yours is a 'love' marriage, even if your parents and family circumstances played an important role in your finding each other, here, among Tamang, our pride/honour lies in making it look like we are following our elders' wishes, even when we find each other." Although this is still largely true, so that few marriages go unvalidated by community ceremonial recognition, more and more young people are meeting on their own, sometimes while working abroad, and occasionally through social media, all of which is shifting the experience, if not yet the ideology, of marriage.[20]

Bourdieu's (1986) 'objectified' forms of cultural capital, too, are amply evidenced in the experiences of contemporary Mhanégang both in the village and beyond in the new circulations of money, fashion, and song. When David Holmberg and I first lived in the village, for example, there was almost no money, not absolutely because people were poor, but because it could not buy anything. Almost everything had to be traded for in grain; you could not eat money. We were fortunate in that a pair of Buddhist lamas, who wanted to put a tin roof on a new temple they were building, came to Mhanégang and were willing to sell us the grain they collected; it was this grain that allowed us to 'purchase' the things we needed locally thereafter. Similarly, when we lived in Mhanégang in the mid-1970s all (all!) the women wove and wore the blue and red *syama* skirts that have subsequently been enjoying a renaissance as the officially designated Tamang traditional dress. Today most women wear

[20] While the idea of writing love letters, as so beautifully documented in Ahearn's (2001) work among Magars, did not surface as particularly significant among the Tamang migrants I have interviewed, it is likely also at play among the literate among them. And there is more and more literacy among Mhanégang Tamang. See also McHugh's memoir-like inquiry (2001, 2004) into changing frameworks for love and honour among Gurungs.

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other clothes—*kurta-suruwal*,[21] *lungi*,[22] *sari*,[23] or western-tailored clothing—in everyday life and this traditional dress is worn at Tamang festivals to display a new found ethnic pride; in the 1970s it was universal everyday clothing, not 'fashion'.

Probably most distinctive of the new forms of Tamang cultural capital, however, is the resurgence of popular Tamang songs. Tamang—both Eastern and Western—are noted throughout Nepal as prodigious composers and singers. The Western Tamang form of *selo* was brought to national attention by one of the earliest and most beloved professional musicians in Nepal, Gopal Yonjan[24] (1943–97), in the early years of Radio Nepal. In the Western Tamang traditions of the Mhanégang region, there were many known and named song genres in the 1970s, all of which, like the weaving of *syama*, had all but died out before the ethnic revitalization movements of the 1990s. One genre, *mhendomaya*, in particular, has found new life and is now the foundation of a robust Tamang popular music industry. Mhendomaya ('flower of love') are courtship songs. They used to be sung through long nights of sung repartee between young men and women navigating the excitement and exigencies of Tamang courtship: what clan are you? Where are you from? Will I find love with you? (March 1998, 2002).

Many of these themes are arguably timeless, albeit with a Tamang inflection, but some of the current remixes are decidedly modern in their concern about love in the time of migration. In the following refrain from Sagar Waiba's mhendomaya for example, which is translated fairly literally below, the young men, flying home from Germany (not a common destination, but a highly desirable one that fit the rhyme scheme), accuse the young women of neglecting their children

[21] Ostensibly, a tunic of varying length worn over pants or leggings of varying tightness considered the 'Nepal national dress' but much influenced by middle-class Indian fashion.

[22] A wrap-around skirt or *sarong* imported both as cloth and as fashion primarily from Southeast Asia, although some of the less expensive cloth also comes from India.

[23] The ubiquitous Indian women's fashion.

[24] Whose personal archives, incidentally, have been bequeathed by his widow Renchin Yonjan to the Cornell Library, where they will be curated.

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in favour of going out dancing, while these same women retort by accusing the very men with whom they are presumably singing and dancing of representing themselves as footloose and fancy free, even though they, too, have children they left behind:

Boys:

> *Mhendomaya* ...[25] I've come back from Germany on a flapping winged machine.
>
> *Mhendomaya* ... Leaving their children behind at home, women are a dancing species.

Girls:

> *Mhendomaya* ... You've come back from Germany on a flapping winged machine.
>
> *Mhendomaya* ... You men still go around calling yourselves single, even after you have a child at home.

The final form of cultural capital is called 'institutional' by Bourdieu (1986) and this, in the cases of the Tamang families I interviewed, is most manifest in their investment in private schooling for their children. The first primary school had only recently opened in Mhanégang when David Holmberg and I were there in 1975–7. The first girls began attending only in 1977. In 1975–7, not one ethnic Tamang from the entire Mhanégang region had successfully passed the SLC.[26] Tamang lamas could read to recite Tibetan religious texts, but often with little understanding of the exact words they were reciting. The village headman had been taught to read and write in Nepali when he was imprisoned with leaders (notably B.P. Koirala) in the movement to overthrow the Ranas; a few young men, including his son, had learned to read and write Nepali, taught by private tutors brought to the village, but only one young woman was even partially literate.

Today, although nationally Tamang have one of the lowest literacy rates in the country and there are still children in Mhanégang who

[25] In this way of singing this genre of song, the phrase *mhendomaya* ('flower of love') is sung at the beginning of each line.

[26] The School Leaving Certificate awarded by examination after 10 years of schooling.

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do not meaningfully attend school, most children nowadays get significantly more schooling than their parents did. The single most commonly cited reason for the families of migrant men to move to Kathmandu is children's education. Schools in the village are inarguably dismal: facilities are grim shells of buildings typically without anything more than crowded benches and narrow tables;[27] teachers are typically poorly trained, inadequately paid, and often absent; there are almost no amenities—not toilets or water, nor books or supplies, and certainly not computers or the internet. To go to a better school, to get a better education, to have a better life, is a universal desire.

TAMANG GENDERED SUBJECTIVITIES: THE OLD ENTANGLES THE NEW

The year-round out-migration of significant numbers of men is a phenomenon without antecedents in Mhanégang. There is not a single household that is not affected either directly or indirectly. In the pattern I have tried to document thus far in this paper, men, in the pre-1990 village, were co-parceners with economic, social, and cultural capital as the basic provider of their families' foundational wealth and livelihood. Today, men are largely absent, or only temporary visitors, in the village, but they are continuing to (try to) provide a basic livelihood for their families. The more involved they become with global wage labour, the more they are dedicated to a discrete productive world of work, segregated from the homes and families they are supporting.

Women in the pre-1990 village were co-parceners with economic, social, and cultural capital as the producer of prosperity in added value and growth. In the village today, women are doing much of men's former work and therefore unable to do what was formerly women's work. The 66 per cent of women left behind in the village are working very hard, without their husband co-parceners; they are no longer able to engage

[27] Since the 2015 earthquakes, the situation in Mhanégang has gotten dramatically worse: all the schools were significantly damaged; structures are supposed to be rebuilt with corporate social responsibility funds from the Korean company building a hydropower project in which 'affected area' Mhanégang lies.

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Table 19.1 Changes in the Tamang co-parcener model of gender

	Pre-1980 village	Post-2000 village	(Post-2000) In Kathmandu (and abroad?)
	LITTLE OR NO MIGRATION	MIGRATION REACHES CURRENT LEVELS (2/3rd of men and 1/3rd of women no longer in the village)	
MEN	Men in village inheriting land and houses, working on farm, especially symbolized in ploughing, to provide basic livelihood for families	Men out of village but continuing to (try to) provide basic livelihood for families (reinforced by state/Hindu/ Khas-Parbatiya norms)	Men out of village increasingly dedicated to a discrete productive world of work but still working in order to (try to) provide basic livelihood for families
	CULTURAL CAPITAL REMAINS MORE CONSTANT Men's valour/courage/honour in cultural capital as basic provider (of foundational wealth)		
WOMEN	CULTURAL CAPITAL BECOMES INCREASINGLY CHALLENGED Women's valour/courage/honour in cultural capital as producer of prosperity (of added value/growth)		
	Women in village inheriting movable wealth, working on farm, but especially valued for entrepreneurial abilities to make own and families' wealth increase, especially symbolized in weaving and brewing	Women in village doing former men's work; unable to do much of the symbolically significant former women's work, notably weaving (doubly violates Khas-Parbatiya norms)	Women out of village, often doing no productive work, but increasingly engaged in 'domestic' work; reproduction and consumption in search of 'love'

Source: Author.

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in the activities which used to give gendered meaning to their lives, like weaving. The further 25 per cent of women from Mhanégang who have migrated to Kathmandu no longer do any productive work at all. Households (and women's place in them) are increasing modelled on middle-class Khas-Parbatiya ideals of domesticity and consumption, with as many consumer products—from rice cookers and televisions to computers and cars—as economically possible. The more involved they become with global wage labour, the more they are engaged in increasingly domestic reproduction and consumption.

In the Mhanégang of the 1970s, there were two forms of work that were absolutely sex-specific: women could not plough and men could not weave, especially not women's syama-skirts. Transgressing these proscriptions was assumed to have dire consequences, of almost mythic-epic proportions. Today they have been utterly transgressed by women, who are having to take over what was previously men's work, including the once unthinkable ploughing. The former co-parcener model of Tamang sex and gender appears to be under serious assault. With all these material changes has come a radical transformation of previous gendered economies of complementarity, but insofar as these changes are not just about what the sexes do, but more deeply about who they are in a system of value which engenders the reproduction of the world as they know it, (and here is the real surprise) male subjectivity is still invested in supporting the family while women's is more substantially adrift. Thus the first conclusion of this paper is that it is women's distinctively Tamang subjectivity that is facing the greater cultural challenge in a post-migration world, even though it is the men who are doing more of the physical moving. Whether they stay behind, come halfway, or go halfway around the world, it is the women who must most dramatically reconfigure their sense of self. Some seem to be managing to do so; some, not.

For some women, like the one (above) who described having been "blind" before she left the village, after which her "eyes were suddenly opened". Clearly the transformation of Tamang women's gendered subjectivities is not an unrelenting tale of trauma and loss. But it was initially puzzling, especially when I contrasted her story with the materially very similar one of another woman. This woman also had been orphaned young. She also ran away to Kathmandu very young and worked in a variety of menial jobs. She, too, married a young man

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in similar circumstances. He is now driving a truck in "Arab": she was unclear where; it took her son to clarify that this was Saudi Arabia. She sits all day in one or the other of her family's two rented rooms, waiting for her husband to call or send money. She herself doesn't know how to call him or write him; she never knows when or if she will hear from him. She tried earning some money herself to mitigate the months when he sent nothing, winding yarn for a nearby carpet factory, rolling cheap cigarettes, and crocheting doilies, but says all that did was to ruin her eyesight. She now rarely goes out. Her two teenage children shop for the day's groceries on their way home from school, if that is, indeed, where they spend their days. She cooks and cleans for them. And cries a lot. So far, she has not, like some of the others described earlier in this paper, transported unknown cargo to unknown destinations for unknown people.

These two cases haunted me. Why were their two cases so materially similar, and yet so radically different? Having erred in my earlier push-pull thinking about Mhanégang migration overall, I explored their material situations again and again: certainly, those with more economic resources were more comfortable; at the bottom end of the economic heap, having a little matters a great deal, when the alternative is having nothing. Initially, I feared I was witnessing the collapse of Tamang gender egalitarianism and the increasing vulnerability of Tamang women. As I witnessed the rush to fashion, domesticity, and consumerism in Tamang households, especially in Kathmandu, it seemed plausible to theorize that they were buying (*sic*) into a middle-to-upper class Khas-Parbatiya ethos of the *grihini* or 'housewife'. As I worked through all the permutations of the transformations in the economic, social, and cultural capital arrangements, two further patterns emerged, which I think show the struggle for persistence in the co-parcener model of Tamang gender. Building houses and sending children to private schools are the highest priority expenses for nearly all out-migrant families. I would argue that these are not only important sources of cultural capital, but they also merge as important patterns for investment because they are the two places where men's and women's senses of virtuous action converge.

From a man's point of view, the work that measures the worth of a man is providing for his family, specifically his children. In the past, this meant ensuring the continuity of the patriline by giving children

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Table 19.2 Education, houses, and migration among the Tamangs

	Before migration		After migration	
Subjectivity	Economic and social capital	Cultural capital	Economic and social capital	Cultural capital
Men's honour/valour/courage in 'providing'	Land, house, patriline (brotherhood)	'Bone', ploughing	Wages	Houses (and children's education)
Women's honour/valour/courage in 'increasing'	Movable property, patriline (sisterhood)	'Flesh,' weaving, brewing	Husbands' wages, doing husbands' former work, and/or own wages	Children's education (and houses)
Antinomy of Tamang gender	**Interdependence of the Tamang sexes**			

Source: Author.

their durable bodies (bones), and provisioning them with what they need to survive, housing, above all. That the worth of a modern Tamang man would elide into sending his wages home to his family and building them the biggest reinforced concrete frame house that he can afford requires no great cultural leap. From a woman's perspective, houses are something that a man should provide but which, in the case of the large slab-and-pillar constructions being built in Kathmandu, require the distinctively honourable women's skill in watchful financial management, through which her husband's remittances can be stretched, to produce. The work that she will most value and be valued for is that which causes the most increase; there are few more palpable manifestations than a big house from a labourer's wages. It is probably also not coincidental that her increasing interest in domesticity and consumption are further enticements to this kind of investment to her emerging sense of self. Squarely within a traditional Tamang woman's obligations to future family prosperity are the children—not just giving birth to her husband's family's children but giving their bodies the fleshy growing parts, nursing and nurturing them, so that they flourish. Her wealth and work contribute not so

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much just to the survival of the children, but to their future prosperity, which, as she understands the modern world, means sending the children to as prestigious an English-medium school in the capital city as her financial managerial capabilities can muster.

From among the choices that migration presents to both men and women, that they would choose houses and education is not accidental, nor is it obvious, except when viewed through the lenses of Tamang gender and the gendered subjectivities it produces. Houses and schooling provide not only opportunities for men to continue to subsidize their families in ways that are recognizable to them as proof of their worth as men, but they also keep open a few avenues for women to retain their own sense of contributing to future family prosperity, although these are less immediately recognizable. For women, as the domestic/political economy of the relations between the Tamang sexes is transforming, there are fewer and fewer familiar opportunities to engage in what had been women's distinctively gendered contributions to increasing their families' wealth and prosperity. Instead, women's daily lives are more and more directed at houses, housekeeping, and reproductive labours, including a newly emerging construction of the meanings of children and home.

***

To return to my earlier suggestion that the problem of differentiating sex from gender is a question of the question: do we want to know what the sexes are doing with their lives and choices—these are questions about sex; or do we want to know what kinds of persons are created in the antinomy of value that strives to ensure the reproduction of a valued world order—this is gender. In the case of Tamang migration that I have presented here, the material relations between the Tamang sexes are changing rapidly and dramatically. Both sexes are living very different lives from their parents, doing different work, and engaged in different social relations. After initially thinking that the structure of Tamang gender must also be changing equally—from the village-based interdependent co-parcener model to an urban model of male wage work and female domestic consumption—I have now come to appreciate the amount of cultural push-back from the Tamang co-parcener model of gender.

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The evidence would suggest that it may be easier for men to imagine they are still operating in a world where the virtues of providing a home and maintenance, although greatly changed materially, have retained the meaningful form for which they had been preparing themselves all their lives. For contemporary Tamang women, the picture is more complicated, and, yet, stems from a common gendered dilemma. Regardless of their specific situation, Tamang women today are hard pressed to maintain the gendered subjectivity of yesterday.

At the risk of appearing too dependent upon Lear's interpretation of the Crow warriors' plight: "With the destruction of this way of life came the destruction of the end or goal—the *telos*—of that life. Their problem, then, was not simply that they could not pursue happiness in the traditional ways. Rather, their conception of *what happiness is* could no longer be lived. The characteristic activities that used to constitute the good life ceased to intelligible acts" (2006: 55). Viewed as a problem in the material worlds of sexed Tamang people, facing radical changes in how their lives are lived, Tamang women today clearly feel the earth shifting beneath them more immediately than Tamang men. Although I know of several women whose subjectivities have been quite broken, I know of no men who seem unmoored in the same way. Even for those women who are not broken—whether they are left behind in the village, migrate only as far as Kathmandu, or leave the subcontinent entirely—the everyday material framework through which they crafted their senses of self must nonetheless be left behind, or, rather, it has left them. The skills and activities their mothers were taught and were poised to teach them, the legends and songs and culturally saturated performances—and even, in Butler's thinking "performativity" (1990, 1993)—are no longer relevant, the very world of co-resident, co-producing, co-parcener partnered sexes and genders is going, if not already gone. It is Tamang women, then, who most need radical hope and courage in order to formulate new concepts of female virtue, value, and valour.

Where will/is this hope coming from? It is a testament to both our courage and malleability, as well as to our insistent sociality as human beings, that at least two contexts are providing rich fodder for this enterprise: popular Tamang song and the emergence of Tamang ethnic pride in the public political sphere. As challenging as contemporary migratory situations are, especially for Tamang women, there

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are definitely arenas (as Lear coined it, saying he had "not wanted to foreclose on human hopefulness" [2006: 51] in Crow futures) for the possibility of a Tamang gender-egalitarian future. Especially in songs.

Some of the most popular of the contemporary songs grapple directly with the problems of migration, separation, and the future of the Tamang co-parcener model. One young singer from the Mhanégang region is Sagar S. Waiba (Moktan). He remixed a Mhendomaya ('Flower of Love') song, which he had learned from the Mhendomaya Youth Club. The version Sagar Waiba popularized has a 40-year lineage. And it's seen significant changes, in instrumentation and lyrics, but the underlying tune is recognizable, as are the themes of competitive singing between men and women about the terms of, as the lyrics of another related song say, "love, sweet love".

Sagar Waiba's runaway hit of the last few years has been *Saikal Kororo*. I will let these words work on your own imagination regarding changes in Tamang gendered subjectivities, but I will point out that, here, the boys seem more willing to change the terms of their relations with wives than the girls:[28]

Boys:

> The train is expensive in Birgunj; let's go on a cycle, with wheels going round and round. Hey! With wheels going round and round!
>
> My mother has called to me "Bring me a daughter-in-law. Hey! Bring one any old way!" she said.
>
> The train is expensive in Birgunj; let's go on a cycle, with wheels going round and round. Hey! The wheels going round and round!

Girls:

> The train is expensive in Birgunj; let's go on a cycle, with wheels going round and round. Hey! With wheels going round and round!
>
> We heard what you said and don't carry us to your village. Hey! Don't carry us off like that!
>
> The train is expensive in Birgunj; let's go on a cycle, with wheels going round and round. Hey! With wheels going round and round!

[28] See 'Sagar Waiba Saikal Kororo' on *Youtube*.

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We heard what you said and don't carry us to your village. Hey! Don't carry us off like that!

Boys:

... [29] whether the hill above, or the hill below, or the hill plastered with the black residue from pressing mustard oil.

In our house, our mother wants a daughter-in-law; she says she lacks a daughter-in-law!

Girls:

... whether the black water buffalo's horns curl upwards or downwards,

[You should] come down to our house bringing the *karsyol pong*[30] that will prevent others from asking for us.

Boys:

Whether the walking trail goes up or down, the stepping stones might be loose and falling,

Myself, I won't bring the *karsyol pong*; I'll just drag you off and away!

Girls:

It won't do to forget our long ago customs.

It's not suitable to go away with a husband sneaking along the shadows of the terrace wall.

To my eye, the continuities far outweigh the transformations in these songs. The versions of our first field stay were replete with images of objects and activities only poorly understood by today's singers. In one rhyme, for example, Sagar Waiba sings about weaving women's iconic Tamang syama-skirts on a *rentsa thara* ('upright loom'). Anyone of his parents' generation would know that you absolutely cannot weave a syama-skirt on anything but a *dora thara* ('backstrap loom'). The critical question, of course, is: When do the objects and activities become so different that the worldview they engender is also utterly reconfig-

[29] Every new refrain actually begins with the repeated: "The train is expensive in Birgunj; let's go on a cycle, with wheels going round and round. Hey! With wheels going round and round!"

[30] The wooden beer/liquor jug that ritually accompanies Tamang requests, including those for a girl's hand in marriage.

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ured? The *karsyol pong* ('wooden beer jug of ritual offerings') cited in the phrases above and the central subject of another of his songs, for example, is so central to the Tamang practice of Tamang gendered exchanges, that it is impossible to imagine anything recognizably (to me and my generation) Tamang without it. But, then again, why can't an empty soda bottle be filled with the meaning of a wooden beer jug? I can't say absolutely whether or how Tamang women and men are going to reconfigure their gendered subjectivities in ways that continue to retain them as interdependent co-parceners, or whether they will succumb either to the Khas-Parbatiya, or the Western, or perhaps even the 'Arab' model of women as house-bound domesticants dependent upon men who are migrant wage labourers, but I am less pessimistic than I was when I began this research. Clearly, the co-parcener paradigm is still strong, although under considerable assault.

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20

AFTERWORD

RETHINKING DIASPORA CONSCIOUSNESS

Sondra L. Hausner

WHEN NEPALIS MOVE AWAY FROM Nepal, for many, Nepal remains home. For them, corroborating what previous scholars of diaspora have found for many communities around the world, Nepal becomes a 'homeland'—a source of imagined and aspirational completeness, a destination for hard-earned cash, if there is enough, and a place to which Nepalis yearn to return, where the food tastes better, the music sounds sweeter, and the religion runs deeper. But this is not to say that new destinations are not home or cannot become home—either for recent arrivals or, especially, for extended generations of migrants long settled in other places, such as Thailand, Burma, or Fiji—who may not feel that Nepal holds that special diasporic place of a homeland. In these cases, Nepal is a land of ancestry, but is neither a home nor a homeland. Our scholarly understanding of a diaspora, and the implicit claim or presumption that a dispersed population from a shared place will have shared characteristics—including and especially a common view of their shared mytho-geographical heritage—does not readily map on to all members of the diaspora's vision of Nepal.

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Diaspora, even or perhaps especially at the level of consciousness, takes many forms. The chapters in this volume show that, contrary to what diaspora scholars have argued, the longer a Nepali community has been settled in a place, the less consciousness members may have of being a 'diaspora' as such. After generations of being in northeast India, Thailand, Myanmar, or Fiji, Nepalis no longer think of themselves as Nepali in the sense of being connected to Nepal: they are Thai, or Burmese, or Fijian—sometimes with a hyphenated identity that includes 'Nepali-', and sometimes not. Sikkimese Nepalis use 'Nepali' in the sense of ethnic group, not nationality; sometimes they report no 'memories' of Nepal at all. By contrast, more recent migrants, such as those travelling to the UK for professional employment or to the US as students or when they (literally) win the lottery, maintain active and close connections to Nepali kin, culture, and networks, through all means available. Of a different financial class, those travelling to India or the Gulf as wage labourers also feel themselves to be entirely of Nepal, compelled—or sometimes choosing—to travel abroad but in either event usually intending to return with great anticipation to Nepal, when the money allows. In both cases, the contemporary country that is Nepal is the active referent. In the sense we find it in this volume, then, diaspora consciousness—the awareness that Nepal is home, far away though it may be, at the first level, and the sense of being connected to other Nepalis, both in Nepal and in other locations around the world, at the second—is stronger and more heightened among recent migrants than among those long settled elsewhere. In fact, the acuteness of diaspora consciousness appears to be inversely related to the length of time for which a Nepali community has been out of Nepal.

The notion of diaspora as we find it in this volume, then, both challenges previous assumptions about the dynamics of diasporas—what diasporas do and how diasporas think and act—and expands the range of definitions about what a diaspora can be. To be a member of a diaspora is not necessarily to be long assimilated elsewhere—such a definition uses the place of origin as a kind of 'heritage' which may or may not be active—nor, importantly, is it to consider the place of origin always as a homeland, nor, finally, is it invariably about a feeling of loss. Sometimes a dispersed population is just that: a group of people who come from the same place and who have subsequently

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travelled the world, for different reasons at different times in different circumstances, some of whom long for their place of origin, and some of whom no longer care to reflect upon it. The chronology, territory, trajectory, labour conditions, and class or caste status of Nepali migrant populations overseas will be those features that determine—and variegate—what it means to have a Nepali diaspora consciousness.

And yet many shared characteristics do seem to traverse location. In the contemporary era, ethnic politics—heatedly debated in Nepal—have made their way to the UK and the US, right alongside the highly coveted visas for entry and for settlement. (Such negotiations are premised on the provision that there is, actually, enough to go around: in the Gulf states, where labour conditions are appalling for Nepalis, the material concerns of everyday life appear to have kept ethnic activism at bay.) Caste divisions and discrimination towards Dalits have also travelled with Nepalis to many locations overseas, no matter that the great waters are meant to undo caste for everyone. Nepali music is sung—and wept to—all over the world, in wealthy and in poor contexts alike.

Political activism among Nepali—and Nepali ethnic—communities worldwide remains high, often (but not always) mirroring political movements in Nepal; long-settled Nepali communities may be much more concerned with making or improving lives in new—and no longer so new—places. Certainly the options for political work available to Nepalis living overseas or outside Nepal are greater: activism can be focused on tackling dynamics in new locations (so-called host societies, or receiving or destination countries)—gaining citizenship or pension or benefit rights in that country, for example, and/or jockeying for influence within the Nepali migrant community—or it can refer to dynamics within Nepal (the so-called sending country), or, as is often the case, both. These politics may reflect the luxury of having enough, or enough to rally, as many migrating individuals and families do when they move to the UK, US, or India: by contrast, Gulf labourers bring with them from Nepal their aspirations for manhood and their love of music more than they bring the 'homeland' politics of their ethnic group.

All aspects of life appear in narrations and analyses of migration, as is logical: migration implies the full mobility of people along with

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all elements of their identities, individual and collective, intact if not in place. Or rather, migration becomes the articulation of certain parts of those identities – gender, for example, as in the cases of men who move to work in India or the Gulf, and who aspire to fulfil certain aspirations of manhood and masculinity; or feelings of obligation, or aspiration. But migration also requires a new configuration, or an effort to reconstruct other parts of self – such as religion, for example, in the cases of Mustangis trying to recreate a sense of home through circumambulation in New York City; or indeed, gender again, in the cases of Tamang women who have been left behind by men who travel abroad. Migration offers the opportunity to move into new political spheres, as in the case of Janajati movements in the UK—which are sometimes a reconfigured version of the old ones, as in the case of Janajati movements in the US. To move is not to leave parts of oneself behind, but to attempt to take all parts of oneself to a new place, sometimes with the conscious knowledge that those aspects may look different against another geographical and cultural background. Thus will diaspora consciousness vary for diverse individuals and groups of Nepalis.

In most cases, Nepal still matters to Nepalis living or working outside of Nepal. For most recent migrants, and most members of recently created diaspora communities, what goes on in Nepal affects life in the diaspora—much as migration affects life in Nepal. The experience of diasporic life is in some sense transitive; this is the meaning of transnationalism. Whenever—and wherever to—it takes place, migration throws into relief the culture-making process, drawing multiple locations together in the aspirations and imaginations of individuals, families, and generations as they learn to make their way in new contexts, creating new configurations of nation, ethnicity, community, and self. How individuals and groups regard Nepal from afar—and whether and the extent to which they regard their own identity as enduringly Nepali—will derive from the circumstances of their new—and old—lives elsewhere.

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ing and research opportunities to both Nepalese and foreign students. Her monograph *'If Each Comes Half Way': Meeting Tamang Women in Nepal* was published in 2002.

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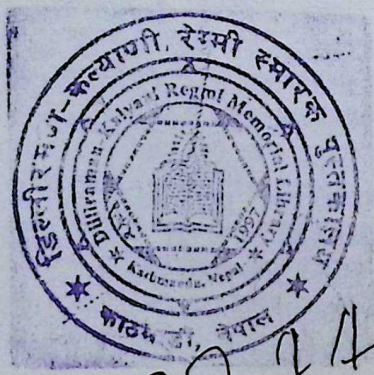

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Migration has been a basic fact of Nepali life for centuries. Over the last thirty years, migration from Nepal has increased exponentially, leading to many new diaspora communities across the world. In these diverse contexts, to what extent do Nepalis reproduce their culture and pass it on to subsequent generations? How much of diaspora life is a response to social and political concerns derived from the homeland? What aspects of Nepali life and culture change? In this volume twenty-one authors address these issues through eighteen detailed case studies that tackle issues of livelihood, identity and belonging, internal conflict, and religious practice, in the UK, the USA, India, Southeast Asia, the Gulf countries, and Fiji. Throughout the volume, we see how being Nepali outside Nepal enables new categories and new kinds of identity to emerge, whether as Nepali, Gorkhali, or as a member of a particular ethnic, regional, or religious group. The common theme of *Global Nepalis* is the exploration of continuity, change, and conflict as new practices and identities develop in Nepali diaspora life.

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Cover photograph: Klyepri and Pachyu Gurung shamanic priests dance at a cremation in Farnborough, UK (F. Gurung, April 2012)

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